VIOLENCE AND THE SYSTEM

IN THE

ENGLISH THEATRE

OF THE

SEVENTIES

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PREFACE

This book is concerned with the question of the relation between violence and system. The reason for raising this question is due to the fact that the present generation believes that we are experiencing a rising tide of antisocial violence in modern society. Consequently, one has to dig deeply into the social system to find out the roots of this prevailing phenomenon of violence. In particular, we draw upon the English theatre in the 1970s, especially the phenomenon of "Alternative" or "Fringe" theatre, which has manifested an interest in approaching such question from broad assumptions about human nature, national character, or social conflict. These premises give rise to inquiries that trace violence to such factors as the breakdown of the social system or, in other words, in the de-systematization of the society and which is a symbol of a new phenomenon that is prevailing in our modern age, that is, the "de" and its offshoots: de-ideologization, de-dogmatization, de-secularization, de-absolutization, etc...

This being the case, this book is designed to clarify these issues within the scope of the English theatre of the seventies with special emphasis on plays which represent this trend of negation through three major issues: system, ideology, technology in relation to violence. These issues are thematically implemented as part of a large national trend of alternative culture and politics for the masses. The technique employed by these dramatists, besides being the implementation of their negative attitude, is used as a methodological means for cultural renewal.

Violence and 'social morality' in Edward Bond's theatre

"We think we live in an age of science, but it's also an age of alchemy : we try to turn gold into human values."

Lear (Introduction)

Edward Bond (1934 -) is considered by many English and European critics as England's most promising and talented dramatist at present.1 He started his career in the theatre in 1958 as a member of the Royal Court's Writers' Group, then run by William Gaskill.2

Bond's arrival on the theatrical scene was gradual and stormy. The reason for the stormy controversy over Bond's plays is due to the nature of their content and form. The main theme that dominates Bond's plays is violence, which he recognizes as the characteristic phenomenon of present day society. In his manifesto-like preface to **Lear,** Bond makes the following announcement :

> I write about violence as naturally as Janes Austen wrote about manners. Violence shapes and obsesses our society, and if we do not stop being violent we have no future. People who do not want writers to write about violence want to stop them writing about us and our time. It would be immoral not to write about violence.3

Bond's consistent focus on the theme of violence as the central theme of his plays, is the distinguishing mark of his theatre. Hence, violence can be regarded as the pivotal concept of Bond's theatre round which other themes revolve.4 Bond's preoccupation with violence in his plays also recurs in his prefaces and interviews, in which he tries to give a theoretical formulation of his dramatic themes. We shall attempt a detailed analysis of **Narrow Road to the Deep North,** during which we will intermittenty refer to Bond's writings and interviews in order to clarify his ideas and attitude towards violence and the British system.

Although the play is set in Japan, Bond makes the time indefinite by stretching it over three centuries suggesting, thus, the continuity of history : "Japan about the seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth centuries."5 Moving again from the general to the particular Bond states that the introduction of the play is "based on an incident in Matsuo Basho's (a 17th century Japanese poet) **The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton**".6 Although the introduction is set apart from the rest of the play, it is linked to the incidents and characters in the play when, at the end, Shogo is identified as the abandoned baby in the introduction. Basho, who appears in the introduction, is also one of the major characters in the play.

We stated previously that the pivotal concept in Bond's theatre is violence. **Narrow Road** is about morality when it be-

comes a form of violence: the morality of "Law and order" which Bond describes as "one of the steps taken to maintain injustice," because it is the moral sanction of "an aggressive social structure which is unjust and must create aggressive social disruption."7 Bond has reiterated on many occasions his ideas about socialized morality as a characteristic feature of repressive authority which both induces and maintains violence by suppressing man's natural expectations and functioning.8 In **Narrow Road,** which is a secularized version of the original Japanese religious play, social morality is represented in its double forms: the secular and the religious. The ideology of religious morality maintained by two forms of repressive authority, the secular and the religious. In this sense, social secular morality is identified with religious morality as forms of violence and suppression of man. But Bond points out that the initiators of such order eventually fall victims to it because "their social morality denies their need for justice, but that need is so basic it can only be escaped by dying or going mad."9 This is dramatically implemented through the characters of Shogo, Georgina, Basho and Kiro. Shogo, the tyrant, and Georgina, the agent of imperialism, are caught in the web of the contradictions of the system which they have created and maintained. Georgina admits bluntly to Basho that she uses a socially converted religious morality as a tool for political authority:

> ...instead of atrocity I use morality. I persuade people — in their hearts — that they are sin, and

> that they have evil thoughts, and that they're greedy and violent and destructive, and — more than anything else — that their bodies must be hidden, and that sex is nasty and corrupting and must be secret- When they believe all that they do what they're told. They don't judge you — they feel guilty themselves and accept that you have the right to judge them. That's how I run the city : the missions and churches and bishops and magistrates and politicians and papers will tell people they are sin and must be kept in order. If sin didn't exist it would be necessary to invent it. I learned all this from my Scottish nanny. She taught our Prime Minister, the Queen, the Leader of the Opposition, and everyone else who matters. They all learned politics across her knee.10

Georgina's final madness is the inevitable solution of the contradiction inherent in the ideology of imperialist authority. She is overcome by the fusion of political power and religious faith through the idea of sin to induce people's sense of guilt in order to make them easily controllable. Finally, Basho's Japanese proverb: "...people who raise ghosts become haunted..." is concretely realized in Georgina's madness. Having raised guilt, she falls prey to it because she is unable to distinguish between religious faith which uses guilt as a tool of repressive authority and political power. "Her sanity has always relied

on a fusion of religious faith and actual power, and now that power has been torn away, she clings to faith."11

Shogo represents an authority without orthodox religious faith. Although he is heedless of religious sanctuary (e.g. when he breaks the sacred pot off Kiro's head), he places himself at the centre of his own sacrosanct world. In other words, Shogo turns himself into a god and his city becomes for him god's holy will realized. He tells Kiro : "I am the city because I made it, but I made it in the image of other men. People wanted to follow me — so I had to lead them. I can't help shaping history — it's my gift, like your piety."12 The people in Shogo's city are similar to the masses in contemporary society whom Bond describes as "waking sleepers... (who) do not know dream from reality."13 Shogo's proclamations are typical announcements of fascism which were heralded by Nietzsche's "Death of God" philosophy.14 The historical consequence of his philosophy was the rise of fascism which brought about death of man. Bond comments : "Blake said that when we try to become more than men we become less than beasts, and that is what we have done".15 When man assumed the role of god he had to fashion his own tools by which he could rule his own kingdom. These man-made tools were designed for the destruction of other men.

Shogo's power, like Georgina's derives from injustice which does not fulfil his own personal fundamental human instinct, which Bond describes as the need for protection of life as

deeply rooted in human identity. His attempt to assert this human need, is shown when he spares the life of the emperor's child after killing his father and taking over the city. This apparently human act contradicts with Shogo's actual unjust authority; he, therefore, falls victim, like Georgina, to the sense of guilt which he fosters in his people and makes the very foundation of his law and order. Sitting by the river, he tells Kiro in a moment of self-revelation : "An odd thing happens to me sometimes. I wake up and think 'Ive done a crime. It's the worst crime that's ever been done."16 So, Shogo's act of saving the child, just as Georgina's care for the five children, exposes the contradiction between man's basic humanity and social morality, and makes him victim as much as victimizer. Whereas Georgina goes mad, Shogo is captured by imperialist forces after the failure of his counter-coup and is executed. However, Shogo should not be seen as a martyr and his words should not be understood as those of someone who repents his actual crimes and tyranny he has exercised over people for so long. He rather tries to save himself when, in his crisis, he realizes that "The circle gets smaller and smaller... and the shadow gets bigger."17 Realizing that power is slipping away from him, he mediates over his state of being encaged, which recalls his words from the beginning: "I can't be on both sides of the door at ance."18 He then pulls himself together and summons his practical energies in order to restore his lost city and power. However,

having been defeated, he now has to pay for all his crimes. Commenting on Shogo's character, Barth writes :

> His (Shogo's) situation reflects the conflict of civilized man whose desire for indepedence and individuality forces upon him repression of basic wishes, the feeling of guilt, and his anxiety about death. In this respect the city itself has in social and psychological theory often been recognized as a symbol of all civilization.19

This conflict is dramatically achieved by presenting Shogo's divided personality through Kiro as the alter-ego of Shogo. The relationship between the two, a relationship between a tyrant and a monk, brings out the contradiction between human values and power. Kiro says about Shogo : "He should be beaten. He's a tyrant and god will destroy him."20 Yet he tries to save the man by escaping with him from the invading army. However, Kiro's inactive and contemplative nature irritates Shogo, the man of action, and he tells him in dismay : "You don't live, you sit and play with yourself and think of God."21 Here, Kiro's faith is made to contrast with that of Shogo's practical god-like power, Their relationship reveals Kiro's self-alienation which stems from the fact that "he has placed the centre of his being outside himself, and, he now sees the object of his faith destroyed."22 Thus, the final execution of Shogo and the sight of his mutilated body, drives Kiro to commit suicide in the Japanese harakiri fashion.

In his self-alienation, Kiro "disembowels himself because he has no inner resources with which to combat his despair."23

Basho's opportunist aspirations reveal the Eastern religious morality (Buddhism) which coincides with the Western religious morality (Christianity). Basho's words: "We need symbols to protect us from ourselves,24 is a reiteration of Georgina's morality: "We need the devil to protect people from themselves."25 This proves that religious morality, whether Eastern or Western, pagan or secular, is basically the same. Both are based on guilt (Georgina's devil), and idolatory (Basho's symbols). Bond explains the consequences of this morality on society and the individual:

> In this struggle pleasure becomes guilt, and the moralizing, censorious, inhuman puritans are formed. Sometimes their aggression is hidden under streneous gleefulness, but it is surprising how little glee is reflected in their opinions and beliefs, and how intolerant, destructive and angry these guardians of morality can be.25

Basho, the advocate of religious morality, also suffers from self alienation because he "locates the centre of his being outside himself. By deciding that he must give priority to the religious virtues of ego-denial and desire-dential, Basho opts out of the material world and leaves a baby to die of exposure and star-

vation...'26 Casting a final look at the baby before he departs to the deep North, Basho exclaims with the utter cruelty and rigidity of a religious fanatic :

> What funny little eyes. (Turns away) It hasn't done anything to **earn** this suffering — it's caused by something greater and more massive : you could call it the irresistible will of heaven. So it must cry to heaven. And I must go to the north.27

Yet, Basho accuses Shogo for being a fanatic because he breaks the holy relic : "A fool destroys men but a fanatic destroys their hope — and he's a fanatic."28 Basho would rather save and protect a sacred object than a human life. This dislocation of human identity by alienating it to man-made object is a manifestation of religious alienation. Basho's alienation drives him to use another human life, that of the emperor's child, to realize his interests. He, therefore, invites violence by plotting for the overthrow of Shogo's regime with the help of the British. Having abandoned the baby at the beginning, who is probably none other than the fallen tyrant Shogo, Basho participates in his execution by announcing in a frenzy : "Shogo is dead. The sin is broken. Let the new city live for ever",29 which is an echo of the commodore's words : "The head of the city has paid for his sin. The city is purged."(30) The mutilated body of Shogo is the externalization of the inherent

cannibalism which is the logical consequence of religious alienation with its Christian overtones :

> Shogo's naked body is nailed to the placard. It has been hacked to pieces and loosely assembled upside down. The limbs have been nailed in roughly the right position, but the whole body is askew and the limbs don't meet the trunk. The head hangs down with the mouth wide open. The genitals are intact.31.

Bond comments on the aggressiveness and violence of Basho by contrasting them with Shogo's: "Shogo, for instance, is very much a victim of what happens. I mean he is not the criminal. If there is a criminal in that play, it's Basho.32 This makes one ask the question : why is Basho only a criminal throughout the play, whereas Shogo and Georgina start as victimizers and end up as victims and even acquire a martyr-like figure ?

Basho is determined from the very beginning as a criminal when he decides to leave the baby by the river and embarks upon his mission to get enlightenment in the north. Returning after thirty years, Basho still has not got enlightenment and he witnesses the atrocities of Shogo (prisoners put into sacks and chained and drowned in the river) without being appalled or even moved by them. He is only moved when Shogo smashes the holy relic. Now the episode of Basho and the baby in the

introduction is actually the foundation of all the ensuing injustice, violence and inhumanity that overcome the city and all the people in the play. Bond says about Basho : "People like Basho never get enlightenment where they are because... enlightenment should have come in the first scene of that play where he found the child. In an ideal society he would have picked that baby up, gone off the stage and there would have been no necessity for a play."33

Bond's statements raise a host of issues which should be clarified and analysed. The first issue deals with Bond's idea of an ideal society which, in turn, implies his criticism of the present imperfections of society. Second, his views about human nature and social behaviour; and thirdly, his interpretation of enlightenment within a particular historical context. These issues have to be analysed in relation to Bond's pivotal concept, violence, albeit within the broad context of the problem of alienation and class consciousness. Bond attempts to explain violence by locating it in man's alienation. Admitting that man's violence and aggression are not a necessity but rather an ability which man uses either as an attack or defence mechanism. Bond explains the aggressive response as follows :

> We respond aggressively when we are constantly deprived of our physical and emotional needs, or when we are threatenend with this; and if we are constantly deprived and threatened in this way — as

> human beings now are — we live in a constant state of aggression. It does not matter how much a man doing routine work in, say, a factory or office is paid : he will still be deprived in this sense. Because he is behaving in a way for which he is not designed, he is alienated from his natural self, and this will have physical and emotional consequences for him. He becomes nervous and tense and he begins to look for threats everywhere. This makes him belligerent and provacative; he becomes a threat to other people, and so his situation rapidly deteriorates.33

Bond's idea about aggression reveals his interpretation of alienation in the Marxian sense. Writing further about alienation, he describes several manifestations of alienation that reveal the dichotomy between human nature and social production by relating this to Marx's concept of alienation :

> Marx has described adult alienation very well, but we can now understand more about it. We can see that most men are spending their lives doing things for which they are not biologically designed. We are not designed for our production lines, housing blocks, even cars; and these things are not designed for us. They are designed, basically, to make profit. And

> because we do not need most of the things we waste our lives in producing, we have to be surrounded by commercial propaganda to make us buy them. This life is so unnatural for us that, for straightforward biological reasons, we become tense, nervous, and these characteristics are fed back into our young.34

So, Bond's interpretation of Marx's concept of alienation is a limitation of the concept within the biological sphere, i.e. man's alienation from nature. Assuming that he is familiar with Marx's multi-dimensional interpretation of alienation, which can be seen in his writings, Bond deliberately makes this arbitrary interpretation because it suits his ideas. He never answers the question of man's alienation in relation to labour and production. For instance, he does not say what is the reason for this alienated and alienating, wasteful production. So that when Bond speaks about the evolution of human alienation, he limits it within strict biological factors, and he concludes that all human problems have biological origins and that the solution of our problems "are basically biological and they have to be answered outside history,"35 which amounts to saying that all human problems are insoluble because they have been created outside history and hence cannot be solved anywhere. He has no answer for the question : how was man's natural and biological nature turned into a social or what he calls "codified" nature, and what caused this split and turned man's consciousness against his own being ? Even when he speaks about money

relations replacing human relations, he does not define in any concrete terms the specific conditions that produced such reified relations. When he speaks about the objective conditions (i.e. money relations) and the subjective conditions (i.e. man's attitude towards money relations) he disregards the major factor, labour. And when he says that we produce not for our human needs but for profit, he does not care to question the economic base of that mode of production which caused the split between human production and commodity production. Hence, Bond reaches the conclusion that civilization is enigmatic : "...the whole of civilization is in a sense a self mask, a self justification."36

The question that arises is: if Bond recognizes alienation as a basic human problem, why does he subordinate it to the problem of violence and aggression ? In other words, does he consider violence and aggression as causes or consequences of alienation ? The point which Bond does not see, or rather chooses to forget, is that the contradiction between the human and the social condition which produces violence and aggression is the highest point of alienation and is the ultimate consequence of the evolution of civilization. The process of evolution represents the conflict between freedom and necessity and man's ultimate emanicipation from necessity to freedom. Primitive man, animal man, was virtually enslaved by nature or what Marx calls "the realm of necessity" in his quest for the means of livelihood. The acquisition of the means

of livelihood kept man in constant struggle with nature with the purpose of controlling the forces of nature and subjugating them to his human needs: food and shelter. In primeaval communities the conflict was between man and nature, and man as a labouring animal, mobilized his forces to conquer nature for his own natural needs. With the progress of labour man could achieve a certain degree of control over nature. This is marked by the transition from the hunting society to agricultural society. In practising agricutlure man achieved a state of partial de-alienation from nature by gaining control over the soil as one of the forces of nature and he, thus, achieved a degree of independence from external conditions. However, the transition brought about a new contradiction: what mattered for man now was not just the control of material forces, but its ownership in order to ensure his sovereignty over it and to protect his individual claim to what he has produced. This gave rise to division of labour and private property which mark the emergence of social classes, and alienation. The result of agricultural civilization was the feudal system. The economy of feudalism faced a crisis that differed from food crisis in the hunting age. It was not a crisis of man against nature but a crisis of man against man, man imprisoned in a system of a religious society which assumed a divine character and claimed an absolute authority. This closed system of ideas was the main obstacle in the way of man's emancipation, as the economy of feudalism proved to be against man's development of a new open system which was growing and gaining power towards

the end of the Middle Ages, namely, the system incarnated into the structure of capitalist system, based on the economy of laissez-faire. This transformation was marked by the emphasis on the individual and secularization of the state. However, with the growth of that system, monopoly and imperialism emerged and turned it into a rigid, closed system. Under this system man's immense creative potentials are transformed into destructive energies. Now man instead of controlling nature he wants to control other human beings because the creation of the surplus value has created and engendered a surplus of aggression and violence to sustain the system. Hence capitalism launches world wars to subjugate other nations and use them as markets for his economic and political goods. Internally capitalism also uses the same tools of aggression though in a different form, in order to maintain the property-owning class. Hence, violence becomes the order of such a social system; the ruling power uses it to perpetuate its control over the means of production, while the alienated working class uses it to liberate itself from such state and to restore the natural relation between man and nature. Once this is realized, man can exercise his capacity to control his life for its own sake, a form of self-realization which has been utterly frustrated by class society.

However, the process of recuperating man's control over nature is faced with many obstacles, the most important of which is the distortion of human relationships. Under capitalism, the

contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production creates the reified consciousness, because production, i.e. human labour, is dominated by the commodity which, in turn, plays the major role in determining human relations. In other words, alienation is displaced from production to consumption, and the most striking manifestation of this is the obvious power of money.37

This distortion creates the reified consciousness and conceals beneath it the essential human consciousness. Hence, under modern capitalism :

> Reification requires that a society learn to satisfy all its needs in terms of commodity exchange. The separation of the producer from his means of production, the dissolution and destruction of all 'natural' production units, etc. and all the social and economic conditions necessary for the emergence of modern capitalism tend to replace 'natural' relations which exhibit human relations more plainly by rationally reified relations.38

This rationally reified relation which replaces natural relations becomes so to speak a second nature to man which he acquires under capitalism. However, because it does not accord with man's natural relations, it becomes an irrational appearance.

makes production of things and of commodities appear as one and the same process. Hence, the commodity form of labour appears as an essential feature of every product of labour and not as a historically determined social relation. The irrational appearance, or the second nature, is only an accidental phenomenon which should not be confused with the necessary, essential natural relations. They differ from each other as much as the accidental differs from the necessary. The irrational appearance produces irrational attitudes; man's stance towards it becomes also irrational and can take the form of violence. Consequently, the human activity must be located in and judged by its concrete and not general features. In other words, material production should be the basis and form and its main features should apply also to other branches of human activity. But because Bond disregards this dimension, he is misled by the irrational appearance and regards it mistakenly as an essential feature of relations:

> Money is an important social tool. It's the means of exchange and of accumulating the surplus to create modern industry. But we've reached a point where money isn't used to remove poverty but to create and satisfy artificial needs so that consumption will maintain profits and industrial activity.39

Bond does not realize that money transforms the use value of products into exchange value, which creates the surplus

value, which is profit. This condition existed ever since the rise of capitalism, but when the system was still in its rising process, it could afford to spend some of its surplus income on social welfare projcets, thus, maintaing the rate of poverty at a possible minimum rate. The situation now is obviously different, and it is this changed situation which marks a process of regression in the capitalist system that is probably annoying Bond. Bond never attacks capitalism openly nor does he even mention the word capitalism in any of his writings or interviews, and it goes without saying that he disregards completely the issue of class society and class struggle. Although he advocates socialism, it is a kind of romantic, utopian formless society that he envisages. He adopts the attitude of a liberal humanist who forgives anyone and anything even violence which, although he attacks, it he sometimes finds it justifiable for people like Shogo to use because he has been suppressed as a child. The absence of the class content in Bond's work, makes him raise the issue of violence as an abstract humanitarian issue. He does not, for instance, discriminate between the violence of the dominating class to which Shogo, Georgina and Basho belong and other social classes. His idea about the ideal society in which Basho would have picked the baby up and went off stage is illusory because in a so called ideal society, there would be no necessity for people to abandon their children in the first place, which the parents of the child did due to their poverty and inability to

support the child. The child's parents did not cast him by the river out of human cruelty but out of dire poverty, a necessity imposed upon them by society. In an ideal society there would be no Bashoes who use human beings as means for their individual interests. That is, the existence of Basho in an ideal society would be a contradiction in terms.

Bond's criticism of contemporary society disregards the class content and concentrates upon the idea that the present society is the culmination of a long historical process of suppression of man's biological needs, in the sense that Bond uses it, the protection of life or the fundamental instinct rooted in human identity. When he talks about the present condition of human nature which he labels as 'animal', he is not referring to man's original state in nature using his energies to preserve himself, but he means another kind of species which destroys itself :

> The predator hunting its prey is violent but not aggressive in the human way. It wants to east, not destroy, and its violence is dangerous to the prey but not to the predator. Animals only become aggressive — that is destructive in the sense — when their lives, territory or status in their group are threatened, or when they mate or are preparing to mate. Even then the aggression is controlled. Fighting is usually ritualized, and the weaker or badly-placed animal

> will be left alone when it runs away or formally submits. Men use much of their energy and skill to make more efficient weapons to destroy each other, but animals have often evolved in ways to ensure they **can't** destroy each other.40

This destructive drive in human beings has not only social but above all psychological repurcussions, and it is with the psychological motivations and responses that Bond is mostly concerned. He attacks religion and social morality which he considers forms of aggression used against man because they suppress his natural identity and turn him through the alleged sin and sense of guilt into a distorted creature. The religious, moral and social taboos have created and nurtured abnormal human beings and a destructive civilization, or in Freudian terms a "neurotic" civilization. Bond's views present society as a conflict between man's instincts of life and forces of destruction, social and political systems. Now this brings him very close to Freud. The following statements from Freud's **Civilization and its Discontents** and Bond's from his prefaces and interviews will reveal the close affinity between the ideas of both.

> ...the inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man, and... it constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization... This aggressive instinct is the derivative and the main representative of the death instinct which we have

> found alongside with Eros and which shares world-dominion with it... the meaning of the evolution of civilization... must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species. This struggle is what all life essentially consists of, and the evolution of civilization may therefore be simply described as the struggle for life of the human species.41

Compare this with Bond's ideas about aggression :

> There is no evidence of an aggressive **need,** as there is of sexual and feeding **needs**... aggression is an ability but not a necessity... If we were aggressive, in the sense that it was **necessary** for us to act aggressively from time to time, we would be condemned to live with an incurable disease; ...We live in ways for which we are not designed and so our daily existence interferes with our natural functioning, and this activates our natural response to threat : aggression.42

Bond seems to be opposing Freud's idea about instinctual aggression, but only seems, because when he says our natural response to threat is aggression, the word natural contradicts with

his denial that aggression is an internal necessity but is an ability or, in other words, a human potential which could be only brought out under certain conditions. Here he agrees with Freud because like him, Bond believes that our neurotic civilization inevitabely drives this latent energy, ability or instinct out.

> If civilization is a necessary course of development from the family to humanity as a whole, then — as a result of the inborn conflict arising from ambivalence, of the eternal struggle between the trends of love and death — there is inexetricable bound up with it an increase of the sense of guilt, which will perhaps reach heights that the individual finds hard to tolerate... any kind of frustration, any thwarted instinctual satisfaction, results, or may result, in a heightening of the sense of guilt... But it is after all only the aggressiveness which is tranformed into a sense of guilt, by being suppressed and made over to the super-ego.43

This is exactly what happens to Georgina. Her madness reveals her inability to tolerate the suppression of her instincts and her sexual hallucinations reveal her frustration through the imposed sense of guilt. About ethics Freud says: "...the ethics based on religion introduces its promises of a better after-life. But so long as virtue is not rewarded here on earth, ethics will, I fancy,

preach in vain."44 Bond thinks that such morality is unjust and aggressive: "Any organization which denies the basic need for biological justice must become aggressive, even though it claims to be moral. This is true of most religions, which say that justice can only be obtained in another world."45 About sin and Christian faith, Freud writes: "... the primal father did not attain divinity until long after he had met his death by violence. The most arresting example of this fateful conjunction is to be seen in the figure of Jesus Christ..."46

Bond apparently recognizes this conjunction and thus, rejects the whole idea : "The idea that a God could kill his son because it was demanded by some eternal law and order, is absolute nonsense."47 Like Freud, Bond is against "Taboos, laws and customs (which) impose further restrictions, which affect both men and women."48 Freud concludes by posing this question :

> The fateful question for the human species seems to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction... Men have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man. They know

> this, and hence comes a large part of their current unrest, their unhappiness and their mood of anxiety. And now it is to be expected that the other of the two 'Heavenly Powers', eternal Eros, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally imortal adversary. But who can foresee with what success and with what result?49)

Bond suggests that probably death might ultimately win the race because "the aggression we generate will be massively expressed through our technology," and the "combination of technology and socialized morality... could lead to (this) disaster."50

However, besides these Freudian corrolations, some of Bond's latest statements reveal a departure from Freudianism, by no means abandoning it, but an attempt at a wider more comprehensive understanding of man's nature and society. Here Bond emphasises three major points about violence and society :

> 1) there is no evidence of a human **need** for violence, and the idea that there is a myth perpetuated because it makes political control more esay.
> 2) Human nature is determined mainly by interactions between the individual and society. It is not innately 'good' or 'bad' but is a product

of the culture that people live in.

3) There is violence in most so-called stable societies, as much as unstable ones.51

In **Saved** Bond examines the myth of original sin which perpetuates violence through an interpretation of the Oedipus complex by relating it to the environment that breeds it.

> ...social and personal problems are solved by alienation or killing... In particular, the murder of the baby shows the Oedipus, atavistic fury fully unleashed... I did not write the play only as an Oedipus comedy. Other things in it — such as the social comment — are more important, but I have not described them in detail here because they are more obvious.(52)

When we read another statement by Bond: "Even if a child escapes undamaged it will still face the same problems as a man. We treat men as children. They have no real political or economic control of their lives, and this makes them afraid of society and their own impotence in it",(53) this establishes a relation between **Saved** and **Narrow Road.** Shogo could be seen as the baby who escapes undamaged and faces the problem of existence as a man. Driven by an Oedipal sense of guilt, he turns into the monster that he becomes and is finally killed. So Shogo's final mutilation links up with the stoning of the baby

in **Saved.** Bond says that **Narrow Road** is about "a non existent child" :

> What I am saying is that if the child does survive, then, yes, it will have been taught that the world in which it finds itself is an absolute alien enemy that it must fight, because it has had to be fighting for its life... Human beings are produced into, are told that their environment is their enemy. They must fight it all the while. So, of course, human beings become vicious, wild, dangerous and all the rest of it. In fact you, could say, Basho didn't save the child and so the child grew up dead.(54)

Bond calls **Saved** an "irresponsibly optimistic" play, yet it shows his disillusionment by the ambivalence between his hopes for a just society and his actual experience : "Like most people I am a pessimist by experience, but an optimist by nature, and I have no doubt that I shall go on being true to my nature. Experience is depressing, and it would be a mistake to be willing to learn from it."(55) Bond is, therefore, against all kinds of systems because in his opinion they cannot solve contradiction between the immense material progress and the relative regression in human values.

> I think that there is no viable political system in existence in the world at the moment; there is no

> political system that really works. Far from ensuring prosperity and happiness, most systems are actually vicious, I mean very bad systems in one form or another and I don't think there is any ambivalence in my plays about this.(56)

He believes that "It is so easy to subordinate justice to power, but when this happens power takes on the dynamics and dialetics of aggression, and then nothing is really changed. Marx did not know about this problem and Lenin discovered it when it was too late."(57) Bond clearly rejects revolution.

Bond's outright opposition to system can be more concretely understaood if we relate it to the general trend that began in the late sixties and early seventies and is still developing in both East and West Europe. At the time when Bond began writing his plays, new problems exploded that differed from the ones previous dramatists had to face :

> It has to be remembered that when Bond began writing, little more than a decade ago, humanity was still wreaking havoc, unchecked and unthinking, upon the world's material resources. There was no 'energy crisis', little recognition that raw materials were not inexhaustible, and no real understanding of the long-term effects of blind technological advance. Neither had these matters much preoccupied the ge-

> neration of playwrights immediately preceding Bond's. John Arden, Arnold Wesker, and (at least in his early work) John Osborne were all socially conscious writers, but essentially in an older tradition, of commitment to political solutions. Bond's early plays were thus prophetic — indeed, they remain so, in that the problems of which he writes are very far from solved, although they are now more widely recognized.(58)

The social and political climate in the late sixties (1968 in particular) is summed by the major leading philosopher who is regarded as the political mentor of this trend, Herbert Marcuse. In a BBC television programme under the title "Men of Ideas" broadcast in 1978, Marcuse said : "What exploded in the late sixties and early seventies was a blatant contrast between the tremendous available social wealth and its miserable, destructive and wasteful use."(59) This explosion took the form of the world student movement in 1968 in which the student activists were largely provoked by the writings of Marcuse. Although this movement was not directed against fascism, which was ultimately defeated, but against other social and political phenomena which Marcuse considers as "potentials of fascism : sexism racism, pollution of the environment, degredation of education and work, etc."(60) All these problems led to a revaluation of some Marxian

concepts, and one of the most important ones concerned the concept of socialism itself as Marcuse says:

> In the development of Marxian theory — not in Marx himself — but in the development of his theory — the concept of Socialism has become increasingly focussed on a more rational, larger development of the productive forces; on an ever higher productivity of labour; on a more rational distribution of the product — instead of stressing that a Socialist society as Marx envisaged it (at least the younger Marx) would be a society qualitatively different from all preceding societies. Now, in what way qualitatively different? The main point, I would say, is that in a Socialist society **life itself** would be essentially different: men and women would in solidarity determine their existence — an existence, without fear. Labour would no longer be the measure of wealth and value, and human beings would not have to spend their life in full-time alienated performances. This point has been obscured, and the result has been some kind of frightening continuity of image between Capitalism and so-called 'real Socialism'.(61)

In his attempt to revise Marxism, Marcuse had to consider one of the major problems which Marxism is accused of having neglected, namely, the individual :

> Marx did not concern himself very much with the individual, and he didn't have to, because in his time the very existence of the proletariat made this class a potentially revolutionary class. Things have changed considerably since, and the question now is : 'To what extent can the present working class in the advanced industrial countries still be called a prolterariat ? The Eurocommunist parties have adondoned this concept altogether. What has taken place is a large-scale integration of perhaps even the majority of the population into the existing Capitalist system. The organized working class no longer has nothing to lose but its chains, but a lot more, and this change has taken place not only on the material but also on the psychological level. The consciousness of the dependent polulation has changed. It is most striking, the extent to which the ruling power structure can manupilate, manage and control not only the consciousness but also the subconscious and unconscious of the individual. This was why my friends at the Frankfurt School considered psychology one of the main branches of knowledge that had to be integrated with Marxian theory — by no means replacing Marxian theory, but taken into it.(62)

Marcuse explains further the essence of the fusion of Marxism and Fruedianism :

> I think these are two interpretations of two different levels of the same whole, of the same totality. The primary drives, the unconscious primary drives which Freud stipulated — namely erotic energy and destructive energy, Eros and Thanatos, the Life Instincts and the Death Instincts — develop within a specific given social framework which in one way or the other regulates their manifestations. The social impact goes even further than that. According to Freud, the more intense the repression in a society, the more sweeping the activation of surplus aggressiveness against this repression. Now since, again according to Freud, repression is bound to increase with the progress of civilization, then at the same time, and parallel to it, surplus aggressiveness will be released on an ever larger scale. In other words, with the progress of civilization, we will have a progress in destuctiveness, self-destruction as well as destruction of others — subjects and objects. It seems to me that this hypothesis well elucidates what happens today.(63)

The main concern of Marcuse's can be seen as the emphasis on technological and psychological planning. In his fusion of Freudianism and Marxism he gives presedence to the psychological element. He also believes, and this is where he disagrees with some New Left tendencies, that "...we are not in a

pre-revolutionary situation and that the strategy has to be adapted to this situation."(64) Marcuse's strategy is the concentration on the rational, technological planning and redistribution of the productive forces.

Bond seems to be very much influenced by this trend for he states:

> Our situation has been made much worse, at least for the time being, by our technological success. The problem can now be described in this brief schematic way. "We evolved in a biosphere but we live in what is more and more becoming a technosphere. We do not fit into it very well and so it activates our biological defences, one of which is aggression. Our environment is changing so rapidly that we cannot wait for biological solutions to evolve. So we should either change our technosphere or use technology to change human nature. But change in our society is really decided on urgent commercial imperatives, so nothing is done to solve our main problem. But a species living in an unfavarouble environment dies out. For us the end will probably be quicker because the aggression we generate will be massively expressed through our technology."(65)

Bond is scared of the combination between technology and socialized morality, and cannot therefore, see any other way in which technology could be made rational and human. The emergence of the new science of Ecology, which started in the West, has tried to solve this problem. However, the solutions, strangely enough, did not come from the West, but from the East :

> Man has always changed nature and will continue to do so, but the technosphere should not destroy but preserve the principles of the organisation of the biosphere, supplement the biosphere and interact with it as part of a single dynamic system. Such symbiosis of technosphere and biosphere (biotechnosphere) makes it possible to speak of a radically new planetary phenomenon and at the same time of a new stage in scientific and technological progress. While the current stage of scientific and technological progress turns natural processes into industrial ones, the new stage is meant to adapt industrial processes to natural ones by evermore harmoniously linking them up with natural rotation of matter and energy in the society-nature system. This particular stage of scientific and technological progress has in fact started Its immediate manifestation is the elaboration and application in production of closed-cycle technology.

> And accordingly, we believe, the problem of the noosphere arises. The term "noo sphere" (Gk. **nous**-mind) was first used in 1927 by the French mathematician and philosopher E. Le Roy, who was a follower of Henri Bergson (see E. Le Roy L'Exigence idealist et le fait de l'Evolution)... the materialist interpretation of the noosphere was given by Vernadsky who considers the noosphere, just like the biosphere, a material formation. "As soon as a living being endowed with intellect apears on our planet, the planet enters a new stage of its history. The biosphere turns into the noosphere."(66)

Hence, this worldwide concern about material and human conservation, with the energy resources and energy destruction, can be in a way considered a distinguishing feature of the late twentieth century just as the problem of fascism was the major current problem in the early and middle of the century. However, there is one thread which unites these different trends, the problem of alienation. In one way or another, these trends can be seen as man's attempt to overcome his alienation.

Now if socialism, as Bond claims, could not realize the simple Marxian anxiom, a free collective society in which the free development of each is the free development of all, how

could this be realized ? In other words, if the emergence of socialism is the inevitable solution of man's alienation under capitalism with its monopoly and imperialism, how can the socialist system prevent man from being alienated by freeing him from another closed system ? The answer is to consider man as an end in himself because only then can man discover and exercise his so far suppressed natural creative abilities to conquer and master the universe. How can man solve the problem of being social and being human, or in other words, how can man develop from a human being to being human by humanizing nature and society ? This is Bond's major concern in his plays which he poses as the problem and which represents his vision. Most of Bond's statements about alienation are generalized and no concrete facts or situations are stated to clarify or justify his criticism. Yet, he desperately advocates a method of change on grounds of his refusal of all ideological systems and without any theoretical basis. He calls for "humane socialist revolution" which does not use violence. He considers all systems rigid and closed including the present socialist one and identifies the phenomenon of political persecution in the USSR with the essence of socialist system. Where then does he find hope of change ? Bond asks this question and tries to answer it :

> What ought we to do ? Live justly. But what is justice ? Justice is allowing people to live in the

> way for which they evolved. Human beings have an emotional and physical need to do so, it is their biological expectation. They **can** only live in this way, or all the time struggle consciously or unconsciously to do so. That is the essential thing I want to say because it means that in fact our society and its morality, which deny this, and its technology which more and more prevents it, all the time whisper into people's ears 'You have no right to live.' That is what lies under the splendour of the modern world. Equality, freedom and fraternity must be reinterpreted in the light of this—other wise real revolutionary change is impossible.(57)

However, Bond fails to connect the maximum of the Enlightenment to our present age. Enlightenment in its early stage was non-committed because the political slogans: liberty, equality, fraternity were void of social content and the class struggle. However, with the evolution of the bourgeoisie, the class content became clearer and, consequently, commitment to it through class consciousness was inevitable. In the post-Enlightenment age, liberty, equality and fraternity should be identified with a particular class. Bond, however, stops at the level of non-committed Enlightenment and, at the same time, refuses to be committed to the bourgeois class. Yet, being liberal in a post-Enlightenment age, necessarily means commitment to the bourgeoisie. The contradiction which arises from

being liberal in the post-Enlightenment age is a formal one. This formal contradiction in which Bond falls, is the result of de-ideologization which is, in turn, the result of the influence of the English national empirical culture. His ultimate solution which will realize the equality, fraternity, liberty, is education. Instead of revolution, Bond advocates secular moral education which is one of the forms of alternative politics and counterculture and democracy which he mentions. "We have to choose a new purpose for society, a new culture. There **is** a counter-culture ready and it's been developing for hundreds of years: it is democracy."(68) This is perfectly in line with the British tradition of parliamentary democracy and reformism and the welfare society. His idea of democracy is vague and his advocacy of alternative politics is a sign of rebellion against the status quo not a call for radical change. He wants to preserve the capitalist institution with its economy of private property and its ideology but achieve a partial change in that ideology that would make it more tolerable. Bond claims that secular education can bring about the rational planning of society and technology: "If we are to improve people's behaviour we must first increase moral understanding, and this means teaching morality to children in a way that they find convincing... that means teaching, oddly enough, moral scepticism and analysis, and not faith."(69) This means that Bond fails to understand the true spirit of the age which the theatre should incorporate, that is, the post-

Enlightenment age committed to the interests of the working class. Commitment to the interests of the masses in the post-Enlightenment age is based on secularization. Although the aspect of secularization is prominent in Bond's plays, particularly in **Narrow Road,** as one of the basic elements of enlightenment, it is given a psychoanalytic interpretation. In this sense, Bond follows the trend of psychoanalytic interpretation of history and its major propagator Norman O. Brown :

> ...Freud becomes relevant when history raises the question : What does man want over and beyond 'economic welfare' and 'mastery over nature' ? Marx defines the essence of man as labor and traces the dialectic of labor in history till labor abolishes itself... Freud suggests that beyond labor there is love, love must have always been there from the beginning of history, and it must have been the hidden force supplying the energy devoted to labor and to making history. From this point of view, repressed Eros is the energy of history and labor must be seen as sublimated Eros. In this way a problem not faced by Marx can be faced with the aid of Freud... men are unconscious of their real desires. Thus a psychology of history must be psychoanalytic.(70)

Hence, the kind of secular moral education which Bond advo-

cate, is a subjective one in the sense that it is guided by the values which man establishes not any transcendental power or authority.(71) Consequently, Bond's commitment takes on a subjective and individualistic colour. His subjective idea about the social function of drama comes through clearly from the following question : "Calder : 'Would you call yourself a committed dramatist ?", to which Bond answers :

> I don't set out to be a social writer, I just set out to write good plays, but I say that with the confidence that comes from knowing that they will have a social function. I think art must have a social function because I think art is the confrontation of justice with law and order, and as justice is always the good thing and law and order is not, then art in that sense is always creative, always evolutional, always on the side of the angels.(72)

Bond's idealistic and subjective approach to drama makes his commitment to the aesthetic aspect of drama stronger than the social one. In the preface to **Bingo** he writes :

> Art is always sane. It always insists on the truth, and tries to express the justice and order that are necessary to sanity but are usually destroyed by society. All imagination is political. It has the urgency of passion, the force of appetite, the self-

authenticity of pain or happiness—imagination is a desire that **makes** an artist create. The truths of imagination are strictly determined and necessary. They aren't 'revealed' to artists, they have to work and train and learn so that they become skilled at discovering them. But every artist often feels that what he's created is 'right' and he's not free to alter it. It's life that in comparison seems arbitrary and random — because society is usually based on injustice or expediency but art is the expression of moral sanity. Philistinism is so shocking because it assumes that, on the contrary, creative imagination is arbitrary and random, a self-satisfying game, fantasy — instead of being vital to human development. And of course, what artists most frequently lack is enough of this creative imagination. Or perhaps they only play it down because they're told art is for the rich and intellectual, that science is work but art only luxury or play. Perhaps also because many people do in fact 'exist' without art. Well, they've only had to do so in modern industrial societies and that's one reason why these societies are stagnant and inhuman. And there are also artists who shut themselves up in private fantasies. What they create has to be interpreted by an extra-artistic language... But imagination isn't random fantasy. The artist's imagination connects

him to his audience's world just as much as his knowledge does.73)

Bond's idea of art is that it can impose moral order on a chaotic world through the artist's subjective moral standards which he derives from his "being-in-the-world", to borrow Heidegger's term, and his direct contact with daily life through his perception of man's alienation. Through his creative imagination the artist will be able to guide man along the path of de-alienation i.e. the creation of a moral, just, free and de-alienated society.

The most prominent technical element in Bond's plays is that of the grotesque. He combines the grotesque and satire as a means to create a distance between the audience and the play. In **Narrow Road to the Deep North** the technique is employed in accordance with the general theme of violence. By making Basho a poet, who should be the embodiment of the forces of good, justice and beauty, instead of spreading justice and order he brings about chaos, injustice, violence and murder. The juxtaposition between being a poet and being cruel as it appears in the Introduction when he dismisses the baby by the river after casting a cruel and hard look at it, brings out the grotesque element of the A-effect by alienating the audience from Basho's character, thus, allowing the au-

dience to criticize and judge it. Besides, there are many related scenes of violence which contribute to the overall satirical attitude towards violence by evoking the elements of the grotesque, e.g. Shogo's murder in cold blood of the five children, Georgina's hysterical cries when she goes mad, the exposition of Shogo's mutilated body and Kiro's suicide. The final scene in which Kiro disembowels himself is a forceful satire on violence when it takes the form of self-annihilation. This scene is placed between two scenes, the first presents Shogo's mutilated body which reveals destruction and death, and the second presents the swimmer emerging from the river safely and, thus, symbolizes continuity of life and the forces of reconstruction as opposed to death and destruction.

Bond's subjective approach, as it appears from his play, reveals a dialectical unity between the subject and the object in which the subject is more prominent. This new presentation of the dialectical relation represents an essential factor that is necessary for the elimination of alienation. Through the interaction between the subjective consciousness of the spectator and the objective factors that cause his alienation, he can start practising his essential human function which is transcendence of alienated, objective reality. This naturally means the participation of the audience in the production of a de-alienated reality, firstly, by drawing up a subjective conceptual scheme of that reality while watching the play. This first and essential step is necessary because it is the first stride in the long and

infinite process of de-alienation. The audience is faced with the problem of the dichotomy between society and morality which, according to Bond, turns people into violent and destructive creatures through the socialized morality in advanced technological societies by combining morality with technology. The solution of this dichotomy lies in the elimination of alienated technology i.e. in humanizing technology and society. The audience is, in turn, faced with the crucial question : how can a society develop in a scientific way and yet avoid the dangers of science ? Through the interaction between subject (the individual) and the objective conditions of society, man can reach a scientific approach to society. The formula of this scientific approach to society is described by Alexandrov :

> Thus a scientific approach presupposes a developed sense of moral responsibility which does not allow an individual to restrict himself to subjective opinions of "what is best". Rather it demands that he come to terms with objectivity, with that which does not hinge upon the opinions and desires of the individual... the only possible means to combat the "danger" of science are a higher level of knowledge and an effort, based upon this knowledge, directed against those social forces which would exploit science. Moral indignation must be supported by knowledge to become effective and purposeful.(75)

The kind of secular education advocated by Bond would lead the society to a conscientious morality which would preserve both the individual and society. This concept of a morally just and conscientious society is again described by Alexandrov:

> In a complete state, moral consciousness is built on three pillars: humanism, responsibility and the scientific approach. Responsibility requires a scientific position but in turn only the latter permits the precision necessary for an understanding of humanism and the responsibilities vested on the human being. Humanism signifies humaneness, or respect for the human personality, the recognition of the principal equality of all humans as self-aware beings with a capacity for creation and self-development and correspondingly, with a pursuit of freedom. This above all presupposes the recognition of the material needs of the individual; otherwise self-development and freedom remain empty phrases. The humanistic ideal of society is that association,... in which the free development of each is the precondition of the free development of all. Responsibility summons one to work for such an ideal; the scientific attitude determines the path to travel to reach this ideal and serves as a guide in this journey.(76)

This is more or less Bond's vision of a humanistic technological society in which man can practise his creative energies freely and without alienation.

We conclude this chapter by asking the question :

What is the nature of Bond's political drama, and how does it contribute to the political theatre in Britain at present ?

The most appropriate answer comes from J. Calder :

> Political theatre for one school of playwrights is in fact an analysis of how power structures work, and the problem they share is how best to show a sequence of events in terms of the workings of power... The interpretation on stage of all observed phenomena in relative terms is especially interesting in terms of politics, with its one constant motivation : Power. However, well-meaning, however, humanitarian or theoretically democratic the politician, Power is always his aim and the closer he approaches it the more his original principles undergo modulation and distortion. By the time power is achieved, it has become an end in itself and the harder the struggle was to achieve it, the more ruthlessly is it retained. That principle seems to me to be well understood by the playwrights of today.(77)

Bond is surely on the top of those playwrights who understand the workings of power and who try to convey it to their audience as adequately as possible. For Bond "all action, whether specifically or generally political, is a matter of understanding individual motivation as honestly and truthfully as possible".(78) His plays are a contribution to an awareness of this situation which is in the first place a political situation since man is a political animal. Bond rejects all political systems which subordinate man to the rigid immoral rule of law and order, thus, alienating him. He therefore, diligently calls for change. However, the real change for Bond "is not the replacement of one ideology with another, but the replacement of systems with the vaguer, more abstract beliefs that constitute human values."(79) In this sense, Bond's political theatre is linked with the more collectively-oriented theatrical trend known as the Fringe theatre.

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2. Tony Coult, **op. cit.,** p. 12.
3. Edward Bond, **Lear** (London : Eyre Methuen, 1972), p. v.
4. Trussler opposes this view : "Edward Bond does not writ about violence : he writes about the effects upon the human spirit of a violent environment." **op. cit.,** p. 3. However, with this statement, Trussler affirms rather than negates the fact that Bond's theatre is dominated by the theme of violence in terms of the dialectical relation between the objective conditions and the subjective response to the phenomenon of violence. However, Bond's concern with violence should be distinguished from another more common concept of

violence, namely that advocated by Antonin Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty". Artaud's idea about cruelty which he propagates in his Second Manifesto under the title "Inner Meaning", centres mainly on a theatrical technique that incorporates in content and form his idea of cruelty : "The Theatre of Cruelty will choose themes and subjects corresponding to the agitation and unrest of our times. It does not intend to leave the task of revealing man or life's contemporary Myths to the cinema. But it will do so in its own way, that is to say, contrary to the world slipping into an economic utilitarian and technological state, it will bring major considerations and fundamental emotions back into style, since modern theatre has overlaid these with the veneer of pseudo-civilised man." **The Theatre and Its Double** London : John Calder, 1977), pp. 81-82.

5. Edward Bond, **Narrow Road to the Deep North** (London : Eyre Methuen, 1973).

6. **Ibid.**

7. Edward Bond, **Lear,** p. vii.

8. Here one should mention another basic difference between Bond's and Artaud's understanding and attitudes towards violence: "This cruetly is not sadistic or bloody, at least not exclusively so. I do not systematically cultivate horror. The cruelty must be taken in its broadest sense, not in the physical, predatory sense usually ascribed to it. And in so doing, I demand the right to make a break with its usual verbal meaning, to break the bonds once and for all, to break asunder the yoke, finally to return to the etymological origins of language, which always evoke a tangible idea through abstract concepts. One may perfectly well envisage pure cruelty without any carnal laceration. Indeed, philosophically speaking, what is cruelty ? From a mental viewpoint, cruelty means strictness, diligence, unrelenting decisiveness, irreversible and absolute determinism. From the

aspect of our own existence, the most current philosophical determinism is an image of cruelty. We are wrong to make cruelty mean merciless bloodshed, pointless pursuits unrelated to physical ills... In fact, cruelty is not synonymous with bloodshed, martyred flesh or crucified enemies. Associating cruelty and torture is only one minor aspect of the problem. Practising cruelty involves a higher determination to which the executioner-tormentor is also subject and which he must be **resolved** to endure when the time comes. Above all, cruelty is very lucid, a kind of strict control and submission to necessity. There is no cruelty without consciousness, without the application of consciousness, for the latter gives practising any act in life a blood red tinge, its cruel overtones, since it is unerstood that being alive always means the death of someone else... Cruelty is not an adjunct of my thoughts, it has always been there, but I had to become conscious of it. I use the word cruelty in the hungering after life, cosmic strictness, relentless necessity, in the Gnostic sense of a living vortex engulfing darkness, in the sense of the inescapably necessary pain without which life could not continue. Good has to be desired, it is the result of an act of willpower, while evil is continuous. When the hidden god creates, he obeys a cruel need for creation imposed on him, yet he cannot avoid creating, thus permitting an ever more condensed, even more consumed nucleus of evil to enter the eye of the willed vortex of good." **op. cit.**, pp. 79-80.
While Arthaud considers cruelty as one of the deepest features of human existence which must be suffered intensely (he could not escape that existential necessity, fell prey to it, suffered from schizophrenia and spent the rest of his life in a mental assylum where he eventually died. Bond, instead of submitting to some kind of transcendental determinism, attacks violence in concrete conditions and as an undesirable social phenomenon.

9. Bond, **Lear,** p. ix.

10. Bond, **Narrow Road,** p. 42.

11. Tony **Coult, op. cit.,** p. 27.

12. Bond, **Narrow Road** p. 30.

13. Bond, **Lear,** p. vi.

14. The philosophy of Nietzsche is voluntarism : He opposed the will to reason. "Struggle for existence" which grows over into the "will to power" is considered the universal driving force of development.
"The phrase 'death of God' became famous through the **Joyous Wisdom** of F.W. Nietzsche (1844-1900), whose philosophy attempted to reconstruct man's understanding of life and good on the basis of a consistent atheism." **The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought,** p. 156.

15. Bond, **Lear,** p. xiii.

16. Bond, **Narrow Road,** p. 45.

17. **Ibid.**

18. **Ibid.,** p. 23.

19. Adolf K.H. Barth, "The Aggressive 'Theartrum Mundi' of Edward Bond; **Narrow Road to the Deep North," Modern Drama,** (vol. XIX, No. I, March, 1976), p. 194.

20. Bond, **Narrow Road,** p. 24.

21. **Ibid.,** p. 46.

22. T. Coult, **op. cit.,** p. 28.

23. **Ibid.,** p. 29.

24. Bond, **Narrow Road,** p. 27.

25. **Ibid.,** p. 42.
25. Bond, **Lear,** p. ix.

26. Tony Coult, **op. cit.,** p. 38.

27. Bond, **Narrow Road,** p. 3.

28. **Ibid.,** p. 18.

29. **Ibid.,** p. 54.

30. **Ibid.,** p. 52.

31. **Ibid.**

32. Bond, Interview in **Gambit** (No. 17, 1977), p. 27.

33. **Ibid.**
33. **Ibid.**

34. Bond, **Lear,** p. xvi.

35. Bond, Interview in **Gambit,** p. 58.

36. **Ibid.,** p. 15.

37. Marx explains this relationship : "A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, not existing between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the sense... It is this definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of relation between things." **Capital** vol. I (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977), p. 72.

38. George Lukacs, **History and Class Consciousness** (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 91.

39. Bond, **Bingo** (London : Eyre Methuen, 1974), pp. x-xi.

40. Bond, **Lear,** p. v.
In the **Gambit** interview, John Calder suggests: "There is something atavistic in (Bond's) whole approach... constantly

going back to something Jungian and ancestral and primitive." Irving Wardle shares the same opinion and adds: "I think what might have thrown people off, is that you only discuss life in terms of remote atavistic origins or possible future Utopia." p. 27.

41. Sigmund Freud, **Civilization and its Discontents** (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 191975), p. 59.

42. Bond, **Lear,** p. xv.

43. Freud, **op. cit.,** p. 68.

44. **Ibid.,** p. 80.

45. Bond, **op. cit.,** p. xvi.

46. Freud, **op. cit.,** pp. 78-79.

47. Bond, in **Gambit,** p. 19.

48. Freud, **op. cit.,** p. 41.

49. **Ibid.,** p. 82.

50. Bond, **Lear,** p. xv.

51. Bond, "Preface", **Saved** in **Plays One** (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), p. 10.

52. Bond, **Saved** (London: Eyre Methuen, 1966), pp. 6-7.

53. Bond, **Lear,** p. xvi.

54. Bond, Interview in **Gambit,** pp. 27-28.

55. **Ibid.,** p. 36.

56. **Ibid.,** p. 27.

57. Bond, **Lear,** p. xiii.

58. Simon Trussler, **op. cit.,** p. 1.

59. H. Marcuse, Interview with Brian MacGee, (edi.) **Men of Ideas** (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 45.

60. **Ibid.**
61. **Ibid.,** pp. 46-47.
62. **Ibid.,** p. 47.
63. **Ibid.,** p. 25.
64. **Ibid.,** p. 48.
65. Bond, **Lear,** p. xvi.

66. I. Maximov and Y. Plenikov, "The Ecological Situation Beyond the Future of Mankind," **Philosophy and World-views of Modern Sciences** in Series of "Problems of Contemporary World" No. 66 (Moscow : USSR Academy of Sciences, 1978), pp. 102-103.

67. Bond, **Lear,** pp. xii-xiii.

68. Bond, **Bingo,** p. xv.

69. Bond, **Saved, Plays One,,** pp. 11-12.

70. Norman Brown, **Life Against Death** (London : Sphere Books, 1964), p. 27.

71. The exponents of this kind of secularization in the field of philosophy are Boultman and Heidegger. Kenneth Canthen observes : "Boultman writes : 'This secularization takes place in every sphere of life : in morality, in law, in politics. For the relation of man to a transcendental power has been abundant in all spheres of life. Heidegger calls this epoch in which the world has become an object, the epoch of subjectivity. The era in which the world is conceived as object is subjected to the planning of man as subject, a planning that is controlled by the values which man himself establishes." **Science, Secularization and God** (New York : Abington Press, 1969), p. 39.

72. Bond, Interview in **Gamit,** p. 37.

73.-74. Bond, **Bingo,** pp. 10-11.

75. A. Alexandrov, "A Scientific Approach to Morality," **Science and Morality** (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1975), pp. 24-25.

76. **Ibid.,** p. 48.

77. John Calder, "Political Theatre in Britain Today," **Gambit** (No. 31, 1977), p. 9.

78. Philip Roberts, "Political Metaphors : The Plays of Edward Bond," **New Edinburgh Review** (No. 30, August, 1975), p. 34.

79. **Ibid.,** p. 35.

SYSTEM, TECHNOLOGY, IDEOLOGY IN THE 'ALTERNATIVE THEATRE'

The recurring theme in Bond's plays of the exploration of repressive tendencies in society which engender violence and aggression among individuals and are a characteristic phenomenon of contemporary advanced industrialised societies produced by the tight amalgamation of technology and socialized morality, recurs with some variations in the works of more recent and younger dramatists in present-day English drama (among the most prominent of these are : Howard Brenton (1942—), David Hare (1947—) and David Edgar (1948). The continuity and insistence with which these dramatists explore and represent this theme, have produced among young writers a qualitatively different mode of writing and producing plays, namely, a collective or group work.(1) This new mode of collective production is what characterizes the English drama since the appearance of Bond's plays, and sets them apart from Osborne and to some extent from Arden, at least the early Arden, since he has written a number of plays jointly with D'Arcy and directed **The Non-Stop Connolly Show** with her. This kind of solidarity within the drama field represents a shift from individual dramatists to groups. The individual playwright is no longer the centre of drama, but priority is now given to tendencies which could be the foundation of a new theatrical trend. The shifting of emphasis from playwrights expresses a decentralization of the role of the dramatist and solves the problem of division of labour within

the theatre between dramatist and director. It has produced a new conception and a new function of the theatre. It is neither the author's nor the director's theatre, but the author-director theatre, or to use Arden's term, the 'playwriter's' theatre. The centre has now been widened, not completely excluded, to include this new formula through the joint authorship and directing of plays. For this reason, any analysis of the new theatrical trends should approach present writers as social phenomena rather than individuals. In this case, the various theatrical tendencies will be tackled by placing them within the historical perspective of the social and ideological forces which form the base of these tendencies.

In correspondence with the shift of emphasis from individual to collective works, we will concentrate on the analysis and interpretation of tendencies and trends within certain theatrical groups in order to illicit the general theatrical scene in England from 1968 until the present time. The reason for choosing 1968 as a point of departure is that this date marks the emergence of a new phenomenon in English theatre known as the fringe or the underground theatre, or sometimes referred to more broadly as Alternative theatre.(2) The emergence of these new channels through which dramatists, directors and actors undertake their collective work, was the direct product of the accumulation of social, economic and political developments which were reflected in social and ideological forces both inside Britain (nationally) and outside it (internationally). These

forces should be defined within the drama field at that period which, in turn, will reveal the spirit of the period inside and outside the theatre.

The year 1968 is a landmark on the map of contemporary world politics because it saw the rise of a new power that has since then been growing and assuming strong international political dimensions, namely, student power. The first sparks of this new power ignited in Paris in May 1968, starting with the student revolt and continuing with ten million workers on strike, and spreading to Italy. West Germany, Spain and which, for a moment, seemed to come near to a European revolution. It had its echo in Asia in Japan and China as well as in U.S.A. and Latin America. In the Eastern camp the year 1968 witnessed the massive rebellion in Czechoslovakia which brought back to the minds the events of Hungary 1956. The remarkable thing, however, about the world student movement, is namely the relatively limited and weak revolt of British students. In order to explain the weakness of student movement in Britain one should first have a concrete historical understanding of the international student movement, pointing out its sociological character, and then relate it to the student situation in Britain.

The beginning of the student movement can be interpreted as a spontaneous rebellion against the state of alienation imposed upon students by the educational institution. The educa-

tional system in the industrially advanced capitalist societies relied upon a rigid academic and intellectual division of labour and specialization, implied in a "managerial technocratic class, permeating university teaching staff and the state, and a student body forced into 'alienated' forms of intellectual production by the exigencies of technical progress."(3) Another aspect of student alienation is represented by the function of the educational institutions, colleges and universities, which is "to generate the themes of ideology within the social system as a whole."(4) The structure of these institutions with their hierarchies and bureaucracies, reflects the capitalist power relations. It thus represents, for the students, an oppressive and repressive authority. The authoritarian character of the power structure of capitalist institutions relied on two major factors: technology and mass media. Therefore, students' actions, whether non-militant sitins, or militant violent confrontations with police forces, are an attempt towards de-alienation. Any such attempts are basically a rejection of all forms of authority which are represented by the three dimensions : system, ideology, technology. Therefore, student revolt is a negation of all three, and their movement is anti-system, anti-technology, anti-ideology.

This negative tendency has to be defined : being anti-system is a rejection of any social system, whether capitalist or socialist, which incorporates social institutions. This negation of system is at the same time a negation of ideology, or the

superstructure of the system which is incorporated in the system's social institutions. Hence, the negative tendencies of these rebellious groups are an attempt at de-institutionalization, i.e. to move outside or beyond the institutions. They are against the bourgeois capitalist system which depends on technological revolution as an essential factor for social change. Technology is rejected by the youth due to its de-humanizing and destructive impact. The students' attitude towards socialist system and its ideology of the working class, represents a kind of disillusionment with the working class due to their bourgeoisization, becoming passive and integrated into contemporary capitalist society, and thus are excluded as a possible revolutionary vanguard. The revolutionary potential of the working class has been robbed by the system through the mass media which distorts working class consciousness by controlling not only the consciousness but also the subconscious and the unconscious of the individuals. This dehumanizing effect of mass media and technology is synonymous with alienation. The nature of this state of alienation caused by technology could be called technological alienation. In other words, the students' feeling of alienation is technological alienation, i.e. alienation caused by technology. Students' militancy is directed against the advanced industrial societies which rely on technology. Hence, their attack is on the technological society irrespective of its class structure. This view of society, in turn, is a negation of ideology which is the outcome of the political situation in

both the Eastern and Western camps. The rebellion of the youth in 1968 is a rejection which implies that the elimination of ideology rather than a social revolution, would be the only solution of alienation. In their rejection of the class struggle, the students activists represent a new version of revolutionary politics which goes beyond the classic wings both right and left. This rejection of the two wings puts the student movement and all New Left tendencies which have emerged since 1968, into a crisis. This implies the transcendence of both opposing ideologies. The concern of this chapter is twofold : first, to show the spirit of the age, represented by the student rebellion, as reflected in theatrical tendencies; and second, to investigate, within the drama field, the possibilities of any transcendence of the already rejected systems and ideologies. However, before we embark on this task, it is necessary to answer the crucial question : Why is the student movement relatively weak and limited in Britain ? Gareth S. Jones attempts to locate the answer in the origins of British national culture :

> Britain is still some considerable distance from the development of a mass student revolt. A central reason for this has been the prior historical absence of any revolutionary culture in Britain. To be truly explosive, the temporary concentration of young intellectual workers needs a vital and creative

> anti-culture to oppose the otherwise suffocating weight of official academic orthodoxy. In France, Italy, Germany and Japan students can gain this necessary sustenance from a powerful tradition of critical and penetrating Marxist thought. In the United States, a lively populist tradition, whatever its intellectual shortcomings, has provided much of the necessary tinder to set alight the student revolt. In Britain the situation is different. Far from challenging the reactionary values embodied in the university, British intellectuals (or what passes for them) have traditionally shared these beliefs and done their utmost to foster conformity to them. Just as the student is presented with an institutional division between non-vocational humanism versus utilitarian technocracy, so he finds the same sterile couplet incarnate in British thought. The absence of any native revolutionary intellectual tradition has thus been an important brake on the emergence of a militant student movement.(5)

Perry Anderson's essay "Components of the National Culture" goes even further in offering an analysis of British national culture and in accounting for the absence of any revolutionary culture that would be a necessary step towards revolutionary action .

Britain, the most conservative major society in Europe, has a culture in its own image : mediocre and inert... Without revolutionary theory, wrote Lenin, there can be no revolutionary movement. Gramsci, in effect, added: without revolutionary culture, there will be no revolutionary theory... British culture as it exists today is a profound obstacle to revolutionary politics... In effect, the culture that is immediately central and internal to any politics, is that which provides our fundamental concepts of man and society... Thus the disciplines which are obviously relevant and amenable to a political and structural analysis are history, sociology, anthropology, economics, political theory, philosophy, aesthetics, literary criticism, psychology and psychonalysis... The culture of British bourgeois society is organized about an absent centre — a total theory of itself, that should have been either a classical sociology or a national Marxism... the absence of a centre produced a series of structural distortions in the character and connexions of the inherited disciplines. Philosophy was restricted to a technical inventory of language. Political theory was thereby cut off from history. History was divorced from the exploration of political ideas. Psychology was counterposed to them, Economics was dissociated from both political theory and history. Aesthetics v'as reduced to psychology. The con-

> gruence of each sector with its neighbour is circular: together they form something like a closed system... The void at the centre of this culture generated a pseudo-centre... The price of missing sociology, let alone Marxism, was the prevalence of psychologism. A culture which lacks the instruments to conceive the social totality inevitably falls back on the nuclear psyche, as First cause of society and history. This invariant substitute... has a logical consequence. Time exists only as intermittence, decline or oblivion. Ultimately,... the twentieth century itself becomes the impossible object. The era of revolution is, necessarily, unthinkable... British culture, as it is now constituted, is a deeply damaging and stifling force, operating against the growth of any revolutionary Left. It quite literally deprives the Left of any source of concepts and categories with which to analyse its own society, and thereby attain the fundamental precondition for changing it. History has tied this knot; only history will ultimately undo it. A revolutionary culture is not for tomorrow. But a revolutionary practice within culture is possible and necessary today. The student struggle is its initial form.(6)

This somewhat lengthly quotation is a necessary pointer to two very important issues: firstly, that British cultural heritage, forming a kind of "closed system", provides a possibility for a

tendency towards the construction of a revolutionary culture by moving outside the "closed system" and constructing a new "open system." Although the nature of this new system is still vague, there are some features of it which could be a prelude to the formation of the new system. The second issue, which emerges from the quotation, is the author's exclusion of natural sciences and creative art from the disciplines that go into the structure of a national culture. Due to the "objectivity" of the first and the "subjectivity" of the latter, Anderson claims, natural sciences because they forge concepts for understanding of nature, not **society,** and art because it deals with man and society, but does not provide us with their concepts..."(7) In our present study, we will concentrate on one of the excluded disciplines, namely art and more specifically dramatic art. By linking drama with the first issue, we will explore the possibilities of constructing an alternative open system which could be the foundation of a revolutionary culture in Britain to emerge from the drama field.

The worldwide response to the student movement had its strongest reflection, outside student circles, in the theatre. The severe economic pressures imposed on young dramatists by the monopoly of the big institutionalized theatres together with the economic and political crises came to a head in 1968, the year which saw the formation of the fringe theatre. Hence the emergence of the Fringe could be interpreted as a kind of spontaneous support of the world student and worker revolt against established authority of all kind.

Another more particular and local event which contributed to the rise of the Fringe are namely the 1967 visits of the American Open Theatre and Cafe La Mama theatrical companies to London.(8) The impact of these two major events marks a breakthrough and a break away from the traditional theatrical institution. This invested the English theatre with a new blood and a new vigour. Peter Ansorge summarizes the situation in the theatre at the time :

> The events of May 1968 in Paris are rarely cited in matters concerning England's own student population. Yet, increasingly, 1967 can be marked out as a watershed in our recent theatrical, if not political history. It was the year, for instance, when an enterprising American, Jim Haynes, launched an experimental Arts Lab in London's Drury Lane, providing our more adventurous audiences with a remarkable shop window on a new theatrical phenomenon — the underground. In the space of a single year the Arts Lab spawned a new generation of young actors, directors and writers who were refusing to work within the context of conventional theatre institutions. With the closure of the Drury Lane venture in 1969 groups like Portable Theatre, Freehold, the People Show and Pip simmons created a nationwide circuit of arts labs, campuses and youth clubs in which to display their highly individual wares to young and

> enthusiastic audiences. The contrasting talents and activities of the Drury Lane groups formed the basic diet of England's underground network. The Arts Council, however, reluctantly, had to come to economic terms with the new migrant troupes, and between 1968 and 1973 they played as vital a part in the life of our subsidized theatre as the Royal Court, National or Royal Shakespeare Company.(9)

However, despite its relatively recent history, the present English Fringe as a movement outside the established theatre, has its roots in the Theatre Workshop which is usually associated with the name of Joan Littlewood. The origin of Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, now established at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, can be traced back to the 1930's before the actual formation of the Theatre Workshop in 1945, namely, "... in the pre-war agitprop activities of Joan Littelewood and Ewan MacColl in the north of England that its true roots are to be found."(10) Under the socio-political conditions of 1930's depression which are somewhat similar to the contemporary post-boom and slump decades of the sixties and seventies, the "Theatre of Action" was founded as an extension of the American Living Theatre. The political attitude of the Theatre of Action was announced in its manifesto :

> The commercial theatre is limited by its dependence upon a small section of society neither desires, nor

> dares to face the urgent and vital problems of today. The theatre, if it is to live, must of necessity reflect the spirit of the age. This spirit is found in the social conflict which dominates world history today — in the ranks of 30,000,000 unemployed, starving for bread, while wheat is burned for fuel. The Theatre of Action realizes that the very class which plays the chief part in contemporary history — the class upon which the prevention of war and the defeat of reaction solely depends — is debarred from expression in the present day theatre. This Theatre will perform, mainly in working-class districts, plays which express the life and struggles of the people. In this sense, the plays done will be political. The members of the Theatre of Action, are actors and actresses, producers, writers, scene-designers and other active supporters of its aims.(11)

The development of the Theatre of Action later into Theatre Union and ultimately into Theatre Workshop, marks a regression from concern with political subjects during the interwar and depression to World War 2 into peace-time and post-World War 2 boom, to concentration on experimentation with theatrical techniques. The most politically conscious play produced by Theatre Workshop is **Oh: What a Lovely War,** a chronicle of World War I which was the "fruit of a close cooperation between writer (Charles Chilton), actor and director (Littlewood).

The whole team participated in detailed research into the period and in the creative task of bringing their material to life in theatrical terms."(12) By shifting their interest from political themes of war and depression, to issues of theatrical technique in times of peace and boom, Theatre Workshop became renown as the "director's theatre". This, in turn, started a whole new era in English theatre which relied on the idea that the theatre is the director's medium. This resulted in the dramatist's alienation from his work under this presumptuous division of labour. The theatrical groups emerging since 1968 try to recapture the spirit of the early days of the Theatre Workshop both in content and form. Hence the various touring companies, like 7.84 run by John MacGrath, and Road Show run by Gavin Richards, and Red Ladder, all carry out a policy based on collective work both in the writing and production of plays. Furthermore, they work mainly but not only, within working class communities and thus provide the working class with a kind of entertainment based on political education in order to raise the social and political consciousness of the working class and which has been for so long distorted by the so-called legitimate institutions. Portable Theatre represents just one of the multitendencies of the Fringe which do not constitute one consistent or united attitude towards the chosen themes or the manner of their representation.

The Fringe is broad and diversified both in political ideo-

logy and theatrical performances, as seen from the various groups some of which occasionally drift into the mainstream or ultimately into the West End venues which they originally set out to reject.

Besides the Portable Theatre which is the product of the Royal Court and which has produced a second generation after Osborne, Arden and Wesker, and could be therefore labeled as the official or institutionalized Fringe, which in any case would be a contradiction in terms, there are other touring companies which have no affiliation to a particular stage company and some others based in West End or London. However, what characterizes these groups is the lack of cohesion and continuity which makes it difficult to label this phenomenon as a movement. It should rather be considered as a multi-dimensional trend that both reflects and transcends the spirit of the period. Hence, the difficulty of establishing one definite criterion to differentiate between the various tendencies.

Yet the one common feature shared by all Fringe groups is their politically orienated attitude. J. Calder states that "Political theatre is primarily theatre about politics."(13) However, being political in the sense of being concerned with the presentation of political issues, is a very loose definition and should be more accurately defined by tracing the various factors that go into the formation of any political trend and determine the nature of the political attitude in order to place the Fringe within

its perspective. The characteristics of any political theatre are historically conditioned, that is, largely determined by the spirit of the period. Writing about the philosophy of the political plays in Britain at present, Calder observes :

> The philosophy which it seems to me is shared by most of our current school of political dramatists is very close to that of French nouveaux romanciers of the fifties and sixties and was best formulated by Robbe-Grillet when he pointed out that today no one believes in the objective reality of an all-powerfull God (the nineteenth century novelist or play-wright by inventing characters about whom everything was known was himself playing God), nor does anyone intelligent believe any longer in the objective reality of science and its experimental methods of discovery (as did Zola, Ibsen and Shaw), but, says Robbe-Grillet, we are today mercifully able to believe subjectively that everything is relative, that there is no absolute truth, that one man's madness is as valid as another's sanity and that the only valid reality for our time is a purely subjective one.(14)

If the last decade is characterized by the spirit of negation, this finds its reflection in the present-day British political theatre. The negative tendencies in contemporary revolutionary politics represented by the rejection of system, ideology and technology,

has an immediate response from young dramatists, so that Calder proclaims that "The strength of the current school of political drama is that it is sophisticated enough to know that both systems are bad, and that no one has the answer, and honest enough to expose the weaknesses of even the best intended paths to a better society."(15)

If one is to summarize the spirit of the period, one could pinpoint it in a number of characteristic features. The first and major feature is the emergence of a new cult that represents, not the individual, but a trend which is a front, reflecting the conflict of systems and institutions. This new cult, based on the negation of system, ideology and technology, adopts an attitude based on the subjective approach to society and politics and a denial of any claim to absolutize any kind of political system. Thus subjectivity and anti-system tendencies are the main features of the new cult which qualify the massive trend of rebellion in the field of contemporary politics. This trend of rebellion outside the theatre is paralleled by a similar trend within contemporary English drama. The cult of trends is parodied by the group or collective work in the theatre. The rejection of system, ideology and technology is also reflected in the plays of Fringe writers. The subjectivity of the current trend of rebellion generally characterizes the works of young dramatists.

We have noted at the beginning of the chapter that the

themes tackled by the young Fringe writers show a variation of the themes explored by Edward Bond. This variation represents a modification of Bond's vision which is coloured by the changing social conditions and the spirit of the period. The rebellion against system and ideology, the subjective approach and the spirit of relativity have all contributed towards the modification of the dramatists' vision. It is no longer the violence and aggression that occupy a focal position in Bond's plays, but violence and aggression — particularly individual violence and urban guerilla warfare — recur not as the pivotal theme but as an outproduct of a larger and broader issue, namely, the "spectacle."(16) The subjective approach has produced attempts to "psychologize" alienation from and by the system whereas relativity produced a changing attitude towards violence and the system.

Moving from the general survey, we will now deal in specific and concrete terms, with the respective dramatists who represent the new trend within the current British theatre. We have chosen to concentrate on some prominent writers whom we will present as representatives of the trend. For the sake of convenience we will classify the Fringe trend into two groups of dramatists each representing two categories. Our criterion of classification relies on the category of transcendence in relation to system, technology, ideology. In this sense the Fringe, which represents a new synthesis incorporated in a new trend

reflected in the drama of fringe writers through the category of transcendence, is an attempt to surpass the system both outside and inside the theatre, i.e. in theme and technique. So, the major category of transcendence of the system is practised within two complementary activities : rebellion and revolution, which quality the multi-tendencies among Fringe groups. Hence the classification will reveal the spirit of the groups' works. This spirit is contained in the ideas and works of the mainstream Portable society and theatre. Hare's words: "to reveal tightly knit social situations in extreme decay."(17) summarize the policy carried out by Portable writers. They represent the pivotal concept in Brenton's plays, and are expressed by Jed, the protagonist of **Magnificence**: "Bomb'em. Again and again. Right through their silver screen. Disrupt the spectacle. The obscene parade, bring it to a halt.(18) The phrase "disrupt the spectacle" expresses Brenton's social and political attitude in a capsulated form. He expresses this concern in his comment on Jed's character :

> I wrote the play for people like Jed. I often feel, like Jed, that I would willingly decapitate certain members of the establishment. A lot of my generation feel like Jed in the play — there's a feeling of rage around, of impotence, a sense that one has to make a mark on the world, on what Jed calls "the obscene parade" which passes on by.(19)

As an epigraph for his play, Brenton choses lines from Brecht's **The Measures Taken** that function as a referential theme underlying the play's action :

> "Sink into the mire
> Embrace the butcher
> But change the world.

These lines, repeated by Jed in the course of the play, recapture the didactic and revolutionary spirit of the early Brechtian "Lehrstucke". Here the negative aspects of society are caused by the spectacle which controls and dominates man's work and relations and smothers his creative energies. In fact education transmitted by the spectacular media has a damaging influence, on man's creative energies, and growing up under such influence is a perpetually harmful experience. Present day British society, which Brenton is exposing, is expressed by A. Cockburn :

> Our waning imperial system needs its combination of bread and circuses to retain the support of the population. In late capitalist society the fetishized commodity and the spectacle conveniently answer this need. In helping to alleviate the curse of overproduction the spectacle brings into existence a motley retinue of its own : Television producers, fashion, consultants, show business personalities, gossip columnists, public relations officers, press de-

partments, etc. The very essence of the spectacle is that the spectator should remain passively receptive towards the whole design, however frenzied he is in the pursuit of a particular spectacular myth or fashion. So long as modishness is accepted as a vocation, then energy, even in quite creative ways, can be expended in its service.(20)

The suppression of man's creative energies through the system's spectacle is intrinsically linked with violence and crime. This theme revolves round the pivotal concept of the spectacle. For Brenton "as much as any dramatist of recent years, has been associated with an obsessive interest in public and private violence — seeming assaults on all versions of law and order. Indeed it is difficult not to separate Brenton's own fascination with the criminal elements of our society."(21) Brenton's concern with the exposition of the criminal and gangster element of the power and affluence of capitalist society is the result of the changing conditions particularly the influence **of the French student movement.**(22)

This is particularly demonstrated in Brenton's **Weapons of Happiness,** performed at the National Theatre in 1976. This play clearly represents the anti-system tendency which permeates all of Brenton's works, through a group of characters. On the one hand, we have the capitalist Ralph Makepeace the factory owner who suppresses the workers with the help of the Trade

Union representative. A group of young militant workers rebel against the alliance of the two powers in a guerilla style. Instead of an official strike which the T.U. man rejects, they attack the factory owner and steal his briefcase which contains all the shady deals, and finally sabotage the whole factory. At the other end, there is Joseph Frank, the emigre veteran of the Czech Communist Party, who is a victim of another oppressive system. The action of the play is dominated by Frank's obsessive memories in which the figures of the Party interrogators and Stalin loom from the past and cast their vivid perspective over the events of the present. Forced to incriminate himself by the Party, Frank escapes from his country and decides to live for the rest of his life a death-in-life existence in a disintegrating society. He rejects the violent and immature acts of Janice, a teen-age English Communist and her group: Billy, Ken, Lena and Alf. His experience with the two systems has rendered him impotent and unwilling to make any attempts at changing his life or society. Yet, he is right in criticizing the young rebels for their lack of theoretical thinking or any clear idea about the method of changing society or controlling the means of production once they secure its ownership. As a matter of fact, by presenting Frank as the victim of the two systems, which both incriminate him, Brenton is incriminating the systems. Yet, whereas he is decidedly against the capitalist system which he represents in the figure of the weak and weary factory owner, Brenton does not totally reject the socialist system, but rather condemns its rigid

ideology, that is, the socialist system when it becomes a dictatorship or a closed system.

The title of the play implies a paradox; it is said by Frank in a question form during the sabotaging of the factory by the young rebels and before he himself takes part in it by dashing toward the factory. The unsuccessful and unplanned rebellion of the militant workers becomes an immature, idealistic hasty act carried out by untrained and ignorant enthusiasts, which cannot change conditions. The actions of the young rebels, like those of most of Brenton's protagonists, are motivated by a sense of frustration "not by the judgements of their societies — but by the **lack** of any definite moral code of justice.(23)

As a result of this feeling of normlessness these groups resort to terrorist acts. In this sense, the group in Brenton's play resembles some ultra left-wing factions which have taken up terrorism since 1968 as a means to defeat capitalism. Groups like Red Army in Japan and Italy, and Baadar Mainhof in Germany use terrorism to defeat fascism because they lack a definite ideology. In an article entitled. "Dr. Marcuse's Children ?", using the title as an alternative to the title of a book by Jillian Becker. **Hitler's Children: The Story of the Baader-Mainhof Terrorist Gang** which claims that the members of this group are followers of Hitler's fascism, Barbara Beck rejects this view:

> The terrorists' ideological utterings were confused and sparse even in their ideological and literate early period; about the only thing that came through clearly was that they wanted to fight the "fascist" West German state, which was (as they learned from Dr. Marcuse) repressive in its tolerance and wracked with late-capitalist alienation, and they were not fussy about their means... To be fair to them, they continued to be unfussy about their methods even if they themselves were the victims.(24)

In this sense, Frank's question "Where are the weapons of happiness ?", sets the act of rebellion in contrast to revolution by evoking Marx's words : "The weapons of criticism obviously cannot replace the criticism of weapons. Material force must be overthrown by material force. But theory also becomes a material force once it has gripped the masses."(25) In the case of the young rebels, their act will obviously not go beyond agitation and a temporary disruption of the system, at least for the present time. Though it might not overthrow the material force of the capitalist system, it will eventually succeed once it has a theory which can then be turned into action by the masses. Rebellion and agitation are necessary preludes on the road to total revolution, and because the time is not yet ripe for revolution, rebellion is the only inevitable activity and only alternative to the system. The accumulation

of such acts of rebellion, which are also sometimes self-destructive revenge on the system or wasteful outlets of personal frustration, could ultimately lead to revolution. This is Brenton's belief :

> I think you'll see a situation in this country where the creation of a really authentic socialist party becomes necessary. This doesn't mean that it will win. That's one of the reasons why it's so important to keep the fringe alive. You're working in conditions where you can control all the means of production. If the censors really do move in, then we'll need to fall back upon the knowledge we have gained from that practical achievement in order to survive. It might sound paranoid but the time may well be near when we really **will** have to go **underground.**(26)

Brenton's obsessions with criminal behaviour and political disillusionment are counterbalanced by the idea of games: "...playing games, returning to child-hood, can be viewed as a creative act. Indeed those activities can be interpreted as a metaphor of the theatre itself"(27). In **Weapons of Happiness,** for instance, the group's underground meetings and their act of rebellion take on the form of play. The games which the characters play whether as children or as grownups, are a positive element and a healthy aspect "in a society facing a moral breakdown and collapse, ...making plays, inventing games,

(are) a force working against pessimism and ruin."(28) Apparently meaningless acts of violence, such as political terrorism, are actually personal as well as public acts of vengeance on the political system. The motivation behind such acts is the urgent need to make a mark on the world, to disrupt the spectacle.

Brenton's thematic concern with the idea of the spectacle is paralleled by a similar concern on the technical level. The main technical feature of his plays is the implied attack on the theatrical tradition of naturalism. Most of his plays contain a variety of opposing styles which sometimes clash together. In **Weapons of Happiness** for instance, episodes from the past occur in the form of cinematic flashbacks or in an almost dream-like manner introduces a surreal effect, e.g. the appearance of Stalin, the shifting to and fro from London to Moscow, and the half-realistic half-symbolic scene at the Planetarium. In **Magnificence** Lenin walks across the stage as a revolutionary representative of a historical stage "which English society has yet to pass through."(29) Brenton believes that the mixture of styles is a modern variation of a common Shakespearean practice. He claims that:

> ...there is a battle to be fought about the styles which are acceptable within one play. Coherence within a play is not a matter of choosing to write in one style. That's just sameness, superficial neatness. Actual

> coherence means using many different styles, moulding them, a deliberate process of selection, in order to express that **whole** in a play, Shakespeare did this all the time—he could move from a comic to a savage scene with great freedom. When writers like Charles Wood and Edward Bond attempt the same thing they get criticised by the reviewers. Variations in tone and method are taken to be signs of incompetence.(30)

Brenton's technique corresponds to the action of the play which is played in the present and is at times dislocated by being mingled with the past. The interpenetration of past and present leaves no room for the future. The movements within the dimensions of the present or the "in-here" and the past or the "out-there", from the present to the past and vice versa achieves the direct effect of disrupting the spectacle through the subjective urge to leave a mark on the world and to cause a puncture in the placidity of the English bourgeois society.

The direct effect of exposing the system and stirring up rebellion against it is cumulative among audiences because it gives them a glimpse of de-alienation. Because de-alienation always happens in the future, being an ad infinitum process, Brenton's plays by moving within past and present point only to the continuity of alienation which is contained in the systems. Brenton's alternative to alienation caused by the systems is

contained in the present, in the direct, spontaneous acts of rebellion that will accumulate and lead to a revolution. But no vision beyond that stage is envisaged or communicated. For Brenton the "out-there" is implied in the past. This is because Brenton and his contemporaries cannot afford to venture any futuristic visions having experienced many disillusionments as a result of the changes which have taken place in the world in general and in England in particular since the 1950's. John Calder sums up the negative attitude of the English dramatists at present :

> The strength of our political theatre lies in its negative attitude. It does not posit any ideal or even reasonable society, but criticizes the societies we have, exposing their weaknesses, dangers and inhumanities. Piecemeal improvement is the best we can hope for, not grandiose visions, and as such a valid political dialogue can take place in the theatre. At the same time black pessimism is not only justified, but probably the best warning system we could have, surrounded as we are by dangers, political, economic, ecological and military, living under a sword of Demacles that will surely fall one day, and at the least it can resign us to a creative stoicism. The role of the theatre seems to me to be nicely calculated to disturb its audience out of its political apathy in what is once again a highly voluble political age.(31)

David Hare, Brenton's collaborator, director and play-wright, combines :

> ...the role of Portable's originator with that of a writer for the commercial theatre... Hare is certainly the brightest literary satirist in the underground. His plays tend to reflect the self-enclosed and, finally, self-defeating society which surrounds middle-class 'progressive' groups... Hare approaches the corruption of the English body politic from the **inside;** showing us the subtle wounds which can fester at the centre as well as on the fringe of our (English) society.(32)

Despite their individual distinct characters as dramatists, Brenton and Hare have managed to collaborate with each other. Although they write in different and some-times contrasting styles, their productive collaboration reveals a common view of the content of their plays. Their indivisible, joint play **Brassneck,** which they wrote together line by line as they state in the play's programme, represents a panoramic view of post-war social and political corruption in a fictional midlands town named Standon Although Hare is not particularly concerned with the kind of exploration into individual terrorism or the exposition of the spectacle which occupy most of Brenton's individual plays, such themes do occur in Hare's plays as secondary issues to a more dominant moral one, namely, to expose "the tension which occurs in people who

try to introduce change into the most self-contained, the most privileged and, paradoxically, the most prepared sectors of English society."(33) Hare's criticism is mainly directed against angry left radicals, trying to expose "the self-made neuroses of the fashionable left as those of the hard line right."(34) Like Brenton, Hare believes that these groups of radicals are motivated by what H. Marcuse calls "a self-inflicted masochism" and, as a result, are steadfast against the public life in England because it is a fraudulent game played by politicians of both right and left in close collaboration. The action of Hare's plays, thus, moves from the exposition of the corrupt establishment from the inside outwards.

This is particularly achieved in **Fanshen,** a play about the Chinese revolution. This play represents the conflicts and contradictions faced by a society in the process of making the revolution and positively solved by the people under the leadership of the party. In the preface to the play, Hare offers **Fanshen** as a positive model for change :

> In 1948 George Orwell wrote : 'When you are in a sinking ship, your thoughts will be about sinking ships.' No one has put the modern writer's difficulty better. European literature of the last seventy years annotates the decline of the West, both in theory and in practice. Nearly every outstanding piece of writing since 1900 belongs to a culture of dissent.

> Writers have been trapped in negatives, forced back into sniping and objection, or into the lurid colours of their private imaginations. At some stage they will have to offer positive models for change, or their function will decay as irrevocably as the society they seek to describe... **(Fanshen)** is a play for Europe, or the West. Besides trying to explain as deftly as possible the aim and operation of land reform in China, to show how it changed men's souls as well as their bodies, the play is much concerned with political leadership, with the relationship in **any** society between leadership and led. In the political climate of Europe where the distrust, between the people and their bureaucracy is now so profound, this seemed a subject of extreme urgency. For **Fanshen** seeks to explain to an audience who have no real experience of change what exactly that change might involve and how it can in practice be effected.(35)

At the beginning of the play it is explained that 'Fanshen" means 'to turn over', and during the revolution came to mean both the turning over of property and the change in people's attitudes. Then peasants introduce themselves directly to the audience and say how much land each possesses and explain why they have 'fanshened'. Then they organize a trial of someone suspected of collaborating with the Japanese. After refusing to pay rent, the peasants take over the land and the landlord's

possessions and start redistributing the wealth among themselves on the basis of the need of each as well as his and her political participation. This rule is changed when a work team representing the communist Party, comes to the village and condemns the leaders in the village for taking much wealth for themselves, and orders a new redistribution entirely according to need. Then the work team is condemned by the party for extremism. During the party meetings, contradictions between people and party are exposed, disagreements are discussed and solved. This shows that the survival of the revolution depended upon continual democratic discussion and mass education. Education, rather than punishment, is the lot of everyone including the erring leaders. The only ones condemned are opponents of the revolution, such as rich landowners who are shown as incorrigably selfish and dishonest.

Fanshen, described by Hare as "an accurate historical record of what once happened in one village four hundred miles south-west of Peking,', can be regarded as a documentary play about the Chinese revolution, or as Hare points out further, "an optimistic document." For that matter it is a political play. However, as in most of his other plays and like the rest of the Fringe political drama. Hare tries not to show clearly where his own sentiments. lie. Yet his own interpretation of events and characters reveal his own subjective interpretation of the play's content.(36) The exposition of the landpoor and landless Chinese peasants in the process of revolutionizing their life and their

political consciousness in their experience with landlords as well as with party representatives, shows that Hare is on the side of the masses in whatever initiative they take. His lesson to the European audience in **Fashen** is that revolutionary change, can only be materialized by the masses when they are in a state of life and death. In his preface Hare's instructions to the actors are :

> You must show that in the way you act. It is a world in which the redistribution is not a pleasant satisfying exercise, as it might be in a European commune, but instead a simple matter of life and death. The actors must try and understand need. It is almost impossible for Westerners with so little experience of suffering to think themselves into the appalling situation of the Chinese peasant in the mid-1940s. But you must find ways of understanding that the political process the play describes guarantees much more than the characters' comfort : it guarantees their actual survival. And so every stage of it, every policy, every disagreement, every celebration is crucial. Show this, and you will show the essence of **Fanshen**.(37)

Hence, it becomes clear that Hare's subjective approach derives from his intension to acquaint a European audience, who still has not had a real experience of radical change, what this change implies in actual practice. Therefore, Hare uses the epic

technique in order to convey the experience of the Chinese people's revolution over their reality. Hence, there are only nine actors, playing about thirty roles on a small bare stage with minimal props, who introduce themselves directly to the audience. Hare manages to recreate the life of a small Chinese village. For example, in his treatment of props he advises the actors to value these props, such as cooking pots, stools, guns, but at the same time, not "to treat them as theatrical props, but as the props of their (people's very existence."(38) He also admits that he faced some problems with the actors when he directed the play. The content of the play presented some difficulties for English actors and Hare's own objectives made it sometimes even more difficult. He insisted that "the production of this play must involve you in continual definition of your objectives and the continual asking of questions."(39) For that essential reason, Hare states further, that the actors difficulty will always lie in their inability to feel "the necessity of a 'fanshen' in the way the Chinese did. Their lives will not depend on it. But unless they identify with the techniques of the fanshen and use them in the production — group discussion, self-criticism and so on — then their version of the play will probably be shallow and superficial."(40) This insistence on the actors' identification with the techniques of fanshen should not be mistaken for a psychological merging with the characters and incidents either in the Aristotelian or in the

Stanislavskijian manner of presentation. But it is rather more a rational and intellectual understanding of the political implications of the play's processes, based on continual discussions between director and actors of the actual historical content of the play. Here the emphasis is on the initiative of the actors, and group discussions. This technique of production has been incoporated in the English political theatre, particularly in the Fringe theatre, because of the collective nature of its methods of playwriting and production. It is now being further modified and developed through the trend of subjective approach and anti-system tendencies which characterize fringe theatre in general.

Another important member of the peer group of Portable Theatre is David Edgar. Edgar emerged first from Bradford, an important centre for the fringe. Having started as a reporter at Bradford university to which he went to review the new plays, Edgar then stayed there and turned to playwriting. As a committed leftist, Edgar is still developing as a dramatist. In his early work, he only wrote direct propaganda pieces as part of an anti-Conservative polical campaign. In 1969 he wrote **Tedderella,** a light mock-pantomime in which Mr. Heath takes the country to the Common Market Ball. **Excuses, Excuses,** written in 1971, expose what Edgar considers to be the guardians of the establishment through the story of a psychologically disturbed young worker. Edgar is also one of the seven authors of **England's Ireland** which is a political propaganda

about England's political intervention in Ireland. Edgar's play **Destiny**, produced at the National Theatre, again explores the issue of racism through a violent attack on the racist, imperialist ideology of the Tory party.

One of the major contradictions facing fringe dramatists is their relation to their audience. By limiting themselves to small theatres and small audiences, the fringe writers have alienated themselves from big stages and big audiences. The contradiction lies in the fact that by wanting to find new audiences and to reject elites, the fringe had created its own, smaller and even more exclusive audience. Hence, they could not reach the basic audience for which the radical theatre is intended, namely, the working class. This situation is a major obstacle that makes the combination of the subjective (working class audience) and the objective (class relations) factors difficult to realize in the theatre. This may be a crucial problem with which a coming generation of playwrights, directors, actors have to cope and find a solution for. However, there are at present some attempts being made within the fringe movement, mainly by touring companies, to overcome this obstacle. Among the more successful and popular touring companies is 7:84 Company created in 1971 by John McGrath, and in 1973 developed into two separate companies — 7:84 Scotland and 7:84 England, and has toured extensively in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Holland.(41) Although McGrath's 7:84 started off as an experimental company, it belongs now to the mainstream. In

this sense, McGrath is, as P. Ansorge remarks, "an almost unique instance of a mainstream writer who chose to join the ranks of the fringe in order to pursue a specific kind of political theatre."(42) McGrath's 7:84 has geen associated with J. Arden and M. D'Arcy's play **The Ballygombeen Bequest** which was the reason for the company's national fame at 1972 Edinburgh Festival where they presented the play's premier. The play's theme about absentee landlordism and British capitalist interests in Ireland, was performed in an informal club atmosphere and was strictly in line with 7 :84 company's policy as stated in the programme :

> The Company work as part of the Labour Movement setting out to provide through the presentation of shows which have a direct relevance to their lives. Most people have never been encouraged to see theatre as anything but entertainment for the elite, 7:84 are trying to help change that image.(43)

McGrath's talents both as a dramatist and director have contributed to the company's success. The Company's political commitment to the Labour Movement is expressed in their performances in working class areas and sometimes in factories, for example, the performance of McGrath's play **Plugged In** at McNeill's Heavy Factory in Glasgow during an occupation by the workers in protest against a redundancy programme.(44) By presenting his plays for working class pub

audiences, McGrath's Company is trying to solve the audience problem by reaching beyond middle-class and student audiences on the fringe to the base of the masses of working class. Although 7:84 works as part of the Labour Movement, it does not show much optimism or faith in the progress of socialism through the Labour Party. The Company's concern for radical theatre and radical social change, as that of most contemprary fringe wirters, as Ansorge points out, "is inclined to view the politics of the Labour Party as only slightly less evil than those practised by the post-1970 ruling Conservative Government."(45) Unlike the earlier generation of dramatists of the 1950s (Osborne, Wesker and early Arden) who had faith in and advocated the gradual change in the English class system, the politics of Mc-Grath's plays represent a decisive change in emphasis towards instant and radical action rather than political or social reformism, which is again a common feature among Fringe writers.

Though the Fringe theatre does not so far form one united political front due to the disparity and diversity of the political lines of the respective dramatists, one can assume that the present situation of the Fringe could develop into what one might broadly term as a socialist theatre movement. Among the important touring companies involved in the socialist theatre movement is Red Ladder. It is a purely radical and political company; political in the sense that it emerged from the political events of 1968, and radical because it emerged from the base

of the social structure i.e. as a genuinely working class theatrical company, Having started under the name of Agitprop Street Players then later Agitprop Theatre, the company started by presenting some street scenes as a contribution to the Greater London Council tenants' rent fight. Since 1969 the Red Ladder Company has decidedly allied itself with the working class and particularly industrial workers.

The experience of the work of Red Ladder and their development as a theatrical group has emerged from and is inextricably founded in concrete situations of class conflict in the process of production. In other words, their theatrical scenes and sketches are written for occasions of political demonstrations and industrial strikes and are then used by the striking workers and their unions in the struggle against unjust conditions of work, e.g. in 1971 Red Ladder presented a fifteen-minute play about the Industrial Relations Act, and in 1972 they showed another play on the occasion of a dockers' strike in protest of the imprisonment of five workers for defying the Industrial Relations Act, and in 1974 another short play was shown as part of a compaign for the provision of day nurseries on Bentilee estate in the Midlands, which also included the social and political aspects of women's oppression. All the plays they present are then followed, and sometimes preceded, by a general discussion with the audience about the play and other more general and related subjects, and leaflets are handed out and future bookings are made. Sometimes certain decisions are

made by the audience during these discussions as a result of their having been enlightened about many things they did not previously quite understand. For example, after a two-hour discussion of the play presented in 1974 about the need for nurseries, the people agreed that they will occupy a building on the estate owned by the local council to turn it into a nursery. This was a concrete result that emerged out of a concrete situation of conflict.(46) However, the repurcussions of the play upon the audience go even deeper than just making a decision about a topical issue, for :

> ...the discussion, and the play which is vital in catalysing the discussion, has done more than that. People have discussed other things : abortion, sexual relations, social conditioning and who it benefits... People realized that the problems they faced — boredom and isolation at home, frustration and alienation at work — were shared by all. It was a common experience.(47)

So the actual play acts as a catalyst that stands in the middle between a particular concrete situation and the discussions which follow the play. By catalysing the objective conditions and the audiences' subjective understanding of and reaction to them, the play succeeds in having a concrete impact on the lives of the audience. In this manner Red Ladder hope to create a working class theatre which would not be culturally alienating

for them. Therefore, the presentation of plays is not their main end; they insist upon the existence of "some kind of structure... within the venue through which the audience can discuss and take up in their lives..."(48) To achieve that difficult task, the group have organized and classified the structure of a venue into several aspects: the discussion, the follow-up, and the relationship between the audience and the group. These three major aspects of the group's work express the kind of system within which they operate. It is an open system based on the dialectical unity between the subjective and the objective factors which, in turn, help realize and maintain a kind of dynamic structure and a dynamic method of presentation. For example, the post-show discussion enables both the group and the audience to exchange experience, as a result of which the play changes and so does the audience and the group's opinions about some issues and questions that had already been raised in the play. By working under the sponsorship of a working class organization — a branch of a trade union, a trades council, a community association — the group are able to gain publicity and can, thus, draw the attention of the kind of audience they seek to educate. This means that the conditions of presenting the plays are as important as the subjects the plays deal with. The relationship between the audience and the group is greatly determined by the analysis and feedback the group gets from discussions with the audience. Hence, audience participation becomes an integral part of the group's work. This participation, which sometimes encompasses the selection and

treatment of material, enables the audience to produce themselves by actively participating in the making of the play. By becoming co-producers in the process of play-making, the audience's alienation from the theatre is gradually eliminated and they can then produce their own theatre which could become part of their daily cultural practice. In this sense, the Red Ladder group belongs to the tradition of the epic didactic theatre which relies upon the elimination of the audience so that they also become actors in the play. The group are conscious of the continuity between their work and that tradition, and their understanding of the epic method of presentation has provided solutions for some technical problems which they faced. Like most revolutionary socialist theatre, the group evolved their style from agit-prop plays which form the roots of the group's plays. Consequently, the major technical problem which they faced was that of entertainment and instruction. To be able to educate and entertain at the same time also implied the problem of technical skill. For in order to solve the dichotomy between entertainment and instruction, which is a feature of bourgeois non-revolutionary theatre, the revolutionary content should be conveyed and moulded in an adequate artistic form. The establishment of a unity of political content and artistic form is the only guarantee for any political propaganda to have artistic quality and to avoid being dry and boring. Therefore, the group try to overcome the limitations of the agit-prop style of presentation. They seek to

reach a new synthesis out of the agit-prop style and the epic theatre. Rather than discard the tradition of bourgeois theatrical forms altogether, the group try to reconstruct this tradition on new bases by adapting it to their political and social tendencies and by integrating it within their agit-prop style in order to give their theatre a more lasting artistic quality, and to make it artistically as well as politically effective. Through the negation of some negative aspects of bourgeois theatre, such as identification and empathy, elaborate plots and characterization, and the incorporation of some elements of epic theatre into their own method of work which they have acquired by experience, they try to reach this synthesis :

> What we have tried to move towards is the combination of three theatrical modes of presentation, firstly, certain elements from our agit-prop plays; secondly, the concept of Epic theatre ; and, thirdly, elements from the bourgeois dramatic tradition... The obvious elements of the Epic theatre are present : the use of placards to point towards the major contradiction in the following episode, so that the audience is watching for that contradiction to appear... the use of music that is totally outside the developing storyline and comments on it, the structuring of the play itself into separate but interconnected episodes, the presentation of occurences that

> are part of our everyday life and that we take for granted, in such a way that they are looked at by the audience with fresh insights.(49)

In addition, the group also use some popular British forms : the technique of the British folk-song, music-hall, pop music. However, the most outstanding characteristic of the group is their strong awareness of the problem of labour in capitalist society which show also in the method of presenting those plays. This is clear from the following quotation :

> In an employer-employee relationship we expect to be alienated from our work situation because we do not have control over how our labour is used. But the alienation is in the structure of the relationship and therefore we can, to some extent, cope with it. If however, one does control one's working environment and yet still feels frustrated by it, what one experiences is a form of self-alienation, and its effect can be very damaging. This is an ever-present danger in a collective work situation.(50)

To solve this problem caused by the contradiction between individualistic social relations inherited from living in a capitalist society and the productive relations in collective work situations, the group have developed what they call "group dynamic" sessions where they try to approximate individual opinions to the group's

general policy by using these sessions as an ensemble approach through which the group can ultimately achieve "a working method that is non-hierarchical and avoids pitfalls of both the oppression of structures and the anarchic tyranny of structurelessness."(51)

To achieve an overall stylistic unity that incorporates the different forms of presentation, the group have resorted to a technique of visual metaphor within a realistic framework in order to avoid the heavy literary or verbal means of communication usually associated with agit-prop theatre. A method of non-verbal and non-literary presentation realized a visualization of political and economic ideas. For instance, as an example of the use of the image as a method of communication to concretize the most elaborate political and economic concepts and theories, in **The Industrial Relations Act** they used the "national cake"as a visual metaphor, and further metaphors were placed to express the idea : "the workers are bakers who bake the national cake, the strike is seen as a knife which cuts the cake; the myth of the 'national interest' is exploded visually because it is the capitalist who sits on top of the cake, the workers purchase cake to eat, the cake itself is a visualisation of the class structure in society."(52) In this manner the concept of wage labour, inflation, the causes of class struggle and the labour theory of surplus value are all explained in a simple dramatic form. They also discard characterization, plot, concepts of place and time in order to achieve" an interplay of directly political

ideas on a symbolic level concretised in the structure and archetypes of the piece."(53) Through this tight structure, the intention is "to try and make the economic and social forces that so deeply affect our lives — which are usually invisible, hidden from our understanding — visible and tangible so that they can be grasped and, hopefully, acted upon."(54)

Finally, although the fringe theatre on the whole does not so far form one united political front due to the disparity and diversity of the political lines of the respective dramatists, one can assume that the present situation of the fringe could develop into what one might broadly term as a socialist theatre movement.

REFERENCES

1. P. Ansorge observes: "Anotable feature of the generation at work in the fringe has been their remarkable willingness to pool their resources on group creations and collaboration." **Disrupting the Spectacle** (London Pitman's Publishing, 1975), p. 18.

   The first attempt was made by the Portable Theatre's workshop group at the Royal Court arranged by the then artistic director William Gaskill and set up by David Hare, who was then resident dramatist at the Court. The Portable group produced two multi-authored plays written by seven writers: **Lay By** and **England's Ireland.** Other instances of collective authorship are the group plays of Joint Stock, 7:84, Red Ladder touring companies. Examples of works written by two writers in collaboration are the plays of David Hare and Howard Brenton.

2. Peter Roberts makes the following remarks about the Alternative theatre: "It could be called Underground Theatre. It could be called off-West End Theatre. It could be called Fringe Theatre. In fact the existence of these and other current names is pointer to the sheer variety of lively work that began by being packaged as the London equivalent of New York's off-off-Broadway. But Alternative Theatre is probably the safest umbrella under which to place the exceedingly heterogeneous activities that Britain has to offer in this area. For if the groups concerned have anything in common at all it is merely that what they can provide is an alternative to mainstream commercial theatre. If that sounds as ambiguous as the Fringe, underground and off-West End labels, it is meant to be. The point is that to attempt to

define Alternative Theatre, it is necessary to invoke a network of seemingly minor considerations quite apart from the dramatic goods which constitute the raison d'être of the various enterprises. These apparently minor considerations concern matters like location, timing and scale. By location is meant that Alternative Theatre is to be found in public houses, on buses and in the street as well as in the basement and attic theatres. By timing is meant the fact that this type of theatre tends to function at lunchtime and late at night rather than during the conventional evening hours. By scale is meant both the size of the production themselves and that of the premises in which they are staged. Minority theatre of this kind is most frequently characterised by short, one-act production put on in small spaces where the relationship between the actor and the audience is necessarily a very close one." **Theatre in Britain** (London : Pitman's Publishing, 1975), p. 91.

3. Gareth Stedman Jones, "The Meaning of the Student Revolt," **Student Power** (ed.) Alexander Cockburn and Robin Blackburn (London : Penguin, 1969), p. 28.

4. Alexander Cockburn and Robin Blackburn, "Introduction" **op. cit.,** p. 17.

5. Gareth Stedman Jones, **op. cit.,** p. 43.

6. Perry Anderson, "Components of the National Culture", **Student Power,** pp. 214-217.

7. **Ibid.,** p. 217.

8. Peter Ansorge compares the impact of the visits of these companies to that of the Berliner Ensemble season in London in 1956. He observes further : "What the performances of the Open Theatre and Cafe La Mama represented for young English audiences in the summer of '67 was in

part an escape from a kind of theatrical claustrophobia. The Open Theatre's **America Hurrah,** for instance, offered an image of protest which was not confined to a specific social structure — we were watching the physical and psychological problems raised by metropolitan living **in general.** The actor would mime a day in a city, the crush of the subway, the office routine, the exhaustion at night, through a physical language which removed any restricting concern with a special time and place. In many of the group theatres both American and British, we are shown a kind of tribal existence on the stage. It is a form of theatre pioneered, of course, by the Living Theatre in which people in groups march, move and sing together as if under the control of some superior and yet unseen power... The idea of an unseen power, locked firmly in both the repressive present and past, stunting and halting our attempts at 'liberation' is a recurring theme in both American and English underground." **op. cit.,** pp. 23-25.

9. **Ibid.,** p. 1.

10. Ewan MacColl, "Grass Roots of Theatre Workshop, **Theatre Quarterly,** (vol. III, No. 9, Jan--March 1973), p. 58.

11. **Ibid.,** p. 61.

12. **Oh : What a Lovely War** (London : Eyre Methuen, 1974).

13. John Calder, "Political Theatre in Britain Today," **Gambit** (vol. 8, no. 31, 1977), p. 5.

14. John Calder, **op. cit.,** p. 8.

15. **Ibid.** p. 11.

16. Though "spectacle" as a term still lacks scientific founda-

tion, it could be defined in a number of ways. A. Cockburn describes it as follows: "In the liberal epoch capitalism consisted of a multitude of competing enterprises supplying the individual commodity to the market. **In the modern capitalist economy** competition is fiercer because it assumes monopolistic and oligopolistic forms, and works itself out on an international scale in the competition of national and international units. In a similar development the isolated, individual commodity is caught up in the general process of the spectacle and of spectacular consumption. Just as monopoly fuses units of production so the spectacle fuses together the items of consumption into a given life style. Traditional bourgeois and proletarian culture is converted into raw material for the fashion industry. Late bourgeois society can offer the underlying population neither security nor adventure. Bourgeois politics with its soporific consensus tries to provide a substitute for the latter. **The chronic institutional stagnation of advanced capitalism is veiled by the dizzying succession of spectacles.** Britain, the most stagnant capitalist country, has naturally become a centre of spectacular production. **Within the electronic space created by the new media the consumer is drenched in the pseudo-dramas and myths of the spectacle: and the ethos and mode of the spectacle penetrates the entire culture. In effect this spectacle supplements the market as the overall regulator of the system. The true source of the value of commodities — namely, human labour — is erased: only the spectacle itself appears to allot values, in the name of fashion."** **"Introduction"**, op. cit., p. 9.

17. David Hare, Interview with Peter Ansorge **Plays and Players** (No. 221, February, 1972).

18. Howard Brenton, **Magnificence** (London : Metheun, 1973), p. 62.

19. Howard Brenton, Interview with Peter Ansorge, **Plays and Players** (vol. 20, No. 10, July 1973), p. 23.

20. Alexander Cockburn, "Introduction", **op. cit.,** pp. 9-10.

21. Peter Ansorge, **op. cit.,** p. 2.

22. Peter Ansorge reports: "Brenton has admitted that at the time (1970) he was under the influence of a group of French intellectuals known as the 'situationists'. The 'situationists' were, interestingly, very important to the Paris students of May '68. In a series of pamphlets, the sitatuationists have described (the) present day Western society as 'the Society of the Spectacle'. To many of Brenton's generation, for whatever differing reasons, public life has come to appear more and more as akind of 'spectacle', a vast game or confidence trick, played by politicians on the public through the media." op. cit., pp. 6-7.

23. Peter Ansorge, **op. cit.,** p. 3.

24. Barbara Beck, "Dr. Marcuse's Children", **Encounter,** (February 1978), p. 76.

25. Karl Marx, "Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction", (edit) Lewis S. Feuer, **Marx and Philosophy** (London: Collins, 1969), p. 305.

26. Howard Brenton, Interview with P. Ansorge, **op. cit.,** p. 7.

27. P. Ansorge, **op. cit.,** pp. 7-8.

28. **Ibid.,** p. 8.

29. Howard Brenton, **op. cit.,** p. 3.

30. Howard Brenton, Interview with P. Ansorge, **op. cit.,** p. 23.

31. John Calder, **op. cit.,** p. 11.

32. P. Ansorge, **op. cit.,** p. 10.

33. P. Ansorge, "David Hare : a war on two fronts". **Plays and Players** (vol. 25, No. 7, April 1978), p. 13.

34. **Ibid.,** p. 18.

35. David Hare, **Fanshen** (London : Father & Faber, 1976), pp. 7-8.

39. The play is Hare's dramatic adaptation of William Hinton's book of the same title. In the preface, Hare explains that he has made radical changes in his dramatized version of Hinton's book in order to make it an instructive play for the Western audiences about the actual experience of social change.

37. D. Hare, Preface, **op. cit.,** pp. 8-9.

38. **Ibid.,** p. 8.

39. **Ibid.,** p. 9.

40. **Ibid.,** p. 10.

41. The 7:84 Company took its peculiar name from one of the less publicized facts about English economic and political life, namely, that seven per cent of the population owns 84 per cent of the country's wealth. P. Ansorge, **op. cit.,** p. 59.

42. **Ibid.,** p. 57.

43. **Ibid.**

44. **Ibid.**, p. 68.

45. **Ibid.**

46. Richard Seyd, "The Theatre of Red Ladder," **New Edinburgh Review** (No. 30, August 1975), p. 37.

47. **Ibid.**

48. **Ibid.**

49. **Ibid.**, p. 41.

50. **Ibid.**, p. 42.

51. **Ibid.**

52. **Ibid.**, p. 39.

53. **Ibid.**

54. **Ibid.**

CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH THEATRE :

A FUTURE VIEW



For an assessment of the contemporary English theatre, particularly the fringe, trend, a major question has to be raised:

How can the attempts of fringe dramatists, which are mainly characterized by a negative attitude, achieve a reconstruction of the system ?

To answer this question we have to define the positive elements implied in the negative tendency in relation to the status quo, both in society and in the theatre. The positive element implicit in the negative attitude of fringe dramatists is represented by the attempt to destructuralize the system for the sake of reconstructing a new conceptual scheme. In this sense, the destruction or the disintegration of the status quo, which stands for alienation and exploitation, leads to a new reconstructed scheme which is higher than the status quo. The activity to surpass alienation means that the fringe writers can transcend reality and consequently change it and shape it to suit the new conditions in society and theatre. Hence, all these attempts adopt Marx's famous phrase : "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways : the point, however, is to change it," to the domain of drama.

Therefore, construction is a priori to destruction, that is, the essentiel role is for construction, i.e. destruction is secondary and not primary. Without a new conceptual scheme, the recons-

truction of a new system, the status quo cannot be annihilated. That is why destruction is secondary to construction. Because the futuristic vision is essential when one decides to destroy the status quo, the positive is a priori to the negative, though in fact destruction appears as if it were primary. Therefore, it is necessary to remove the optical illusion that only through the destruction of the status quo reconstruction can take place. The transcendence of the status quo has three dimensions which represent the major areas of negation : system, ideology, technology. Through the destruction of the status quo reconstruction can take place.

Concerning the first issue, system, it is contained in the framework within which the English fringe produce their plays. Here the new phenomenon of the subjective approach acts as the foundation of a new theatrical formula. The new dimensions which have emerged with the student movement and the New Left groups provide the possibilities which result in the negation of alienation. This is reflected on the content and form and the result is a new technique. By giving priority to the subjective factor, the fringe writers make the relation between subject (spectator) and object (play) more intricate and interrelated. Hence, the separation of subject and object, due to the predominance of the role of the subject, cannot take place. Therefore, any change in technique should rely upon the dialectical relation between subject and object which necessitates the participation of the audience. Hence, the technique will acquire

a new function. In the classical Aristotelian theatre, there is identification on the part of the audience, which demands the passivity of the spectator in order to allow the play to induce in him catharsis. In the alternative theatre, the attempt is being made to combine the passive and the active subject and object together in a dialectical relation through the unity of opposites, so that there may be distance and participation on the part of the audience. Consequently, the audience become part of the play by playing an active and positive role in it. Hence, the major problem facing fringe and post-fringe dramatists is how to sustain a certain level of dynamism for their theatre in order to cope with the ever changing social and theatrical conditions. In other words, this necessiates that those dramatists have to work towards avoiding the transformation of their theatre into an "ism" in the sense of turning into a closed system. This is an essential condition upon which the reconstruction of the system must be founded. Otherwise, the negation would be a mere destruction of the system and would prevent any possibility to reconstruct a new "ism" that would be an open system and not a closed one.

Concerning the second issue, ideology, the emphasis is now placed on the superstructure rather than the infrastructure which is represented in the active role of the subject. Technological revolution is rejected by student and New Left groups on grounds that it isolates man and alienates him by negating his

creative energies and transforming him into a robot. Hence, they are against technological revolution and negate class struggle. Consequently, they negate ideology on pretence that the elimination of ideology would end alienation without social revolution. However, the point should be how to eliminate this alienation and to humanize technology, i.e. to allow man to exercise freely his creative energies through practising the basic human capacity, namely, transcending reality.

The futuristic theatre has to face these three elements through the active role of the subject in order to satisfy the essential part of human being which is implicit in his capacity of transcending existing reality which is incorporated in the status quo. Otherwise, if he does not practise this function he is not human, and the theatre would be a negation of man's humanity. So long as the real being of human being is to transcend his being, man would be a positive subject before being negative and any negative attitude on his part would be a prelude to the positive. This means that the positive is implicit in the negative. Using Aristotelian terms, we may infer from the previously mentioned idea that the pro quo is "potential" whereas the status quo is only "actual". Consequently, man's essential being is implicit not in "what is" (status quo), but in what "would be" (pro quo). Since de-alienation is always placed in the future being an ad infinitum process of transcendence of alienation, priority should always be given to the "would be".

Any technique which makes the subject passive alienates him because it abolishes transcendence of reality which is an essential feature of the subject's nature. To satisfy the subject's incessant striving for transcendence of reality, de-alienation is required which means transcendence of alienated reality. This can only be realized by revealing the active role of the subject, in the sense of allowing the spectator to become an integral and active part of the drama. De-alienation, which is an essential pivotal concept in the fringe drama, is represented by the subjective tendency contained in the writers' insistence to expose the system from within and to make a mark on it. By exposing the system, the subjective element would itself be a revelation of the disintegration of that very system because the subjective factor can only emerge and become strong at the expense of the objective factor. This subjective tendency on the part of the new dramatists is only a sign of rebellion. That is because these young rebels have discovered that revolution cannot take place now, at least not in England due to the present state of cultural stagnation and which is the result of accumulation of a conservative cultural heritage, forming an obstacle in the way of a new revolutionary culture. Therefore, the only alternative is in "evolutionary rebellion", i.e. evolution of rebellion would lead to revolution by offering an alternative culture to the stagnant one. Hence a new revolutionary culture would emerge in which the drama would be an active participant. By transcending the traditional stagnant anti-revolutionary culture, evolutionary re-

bellion would ultimately lead to a radical change through transformation from quantity to quality.

According to the dialectical movement in spiral, the present attempts made by fringe writers are a step backwards that precedes the leap forward. Here a question might arise as to what the nature of the new revolutionary theatre would be. The answer to this question is beyond the concern and scope of the present study, and should be left for the future development in the English society and its reflection on the theatre. However, one could attempt a theoretical conceptualization as to the manner and means of achieving this revolution in the theatre. We have previously mentioned the term "evolutionary rebellion" which would, through accumulation of rebellion, ultimately lead to revolution. If we draw the analogy between the process of accumulation of surplus value which builds up capital, the basis of capitalist economy, then is transformed into its opposite, socialism through revolution, the surplus of evolutionary rebellion would turn into revolution. However, there should be aspects of evolution already discernable in the process of evolutionary rebellion which would be the foundation of the opposite system. The aspects of revolution are contained in the negation of the system within the framework of the status quo which would accumulate and lead to the pro quo. The direct purpose of negation of the status quo is to expose the disintegration of the status quo through surplus rebellion, paving the way thus for the emergence of the new pro quo. Being qualitatively different

from the status quo within which the surplus rebellion works, its characteristic features are also qualitatively different from those of evolutionary rebellion, such as the use of violence and guerilla style as means of negating the status quo. Hence the idea that the fringe theatre as a social phenomenon can produce and sustain groups of playwrights, directors, actors and stage designers who could act as catalyst groups in the process of change from rebellion to revolution. Their surplus rebellion, however, is only effective within the present social system which they discredit by exposing its disintegration, but will not succeed in eliminating it altogether. Therefore, new groups must emerge as a result of more accumulation of surplus rebellion. The new groups will reveal the true nature of the "would be" system that would eliminate a particular form of alienation which is experienced by the present young writers through the institutions which destroy the originality and creativity of the individual. Hence, one can presume that the future of society and drama lies in the creation of a new institution which allows and encourages the creativity of each individual. In this case, the "would be" revolution will depend upon reconstructing a creative society or a society of creativity in which the free development of one is the free development of all. In this sense, one can consider the groups of English fringe dramatists a more positive phenomenon in the English theatre in comparison with the previous generation of Osborne, Wesker, Pinter, and early Arden.

The final question now is : How far can the attempts of fringe dramatists to de-structuralize the present social system, through a classless content, have continuity in order to lead up to the reconstruction of a new social system ?

Our answer is that : in order to achieve continuity and to become an essential, instead of an accidental phenomenon in the English theatre, the fringe dramatists must complete and replace the anti-system idea by an open-system idea based on an understanding of man in his concrete, dynamic and ever changing historical situation. In this way can they prevail historically, that is, allow further developments which may criticize them systematically without themselves being a system closed on all four. In order to be politically and socially more effective in the process of evolutionary rebellion, young dramatists who fight the system from within in the field of drama, should work more in alliance with the social and political forces who fight the system from without, that is, outside the drama field.

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